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Christian Courier

A REFORMED WEEKLY

DECEMBER 1, 1995/No. 2466

Council of CRCs in Canada seeks place among other churches, cultures

Johannes DeViet and CC Staff

LONDON, Ont. — The Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada prefaced its biennial, three-day meeting, held this year in London, Ont., with a Sunday of thanksgiving on November 12 for the growth of the CRC in Canada and as an occasion for prayer for council's deliberations November 13-16.

It was pointed out that the Christian Reformed Church now has 216 congregations in Canada. People from those congregations founded and still support numerous Christian schools, two colleges (universities) and a handful of Christian organizations, some of which are highly visible in the public arena.

COURTESY CCRCC

Opening devotions at the Council of CRCs in Canada meeting.

Two important issues the council faced this year, according to executive secretary Arie Van Eek, were the relationship of the CRC to the Canadian Council of Churches and the question of syncretism when parts of a different religion are integrated into Christianity.

Looser coalition

The council redefined its relationship to the mainstream Canadian Council of Churches. Because the CCC has itself just completed a two-year search for a more productive partnership with its member denominations, it can now be described as a *forum* for its members rather than a more independent entity, delegates were told. What this means, according to Van Eek, is that when all the participating churches agree on an issue the

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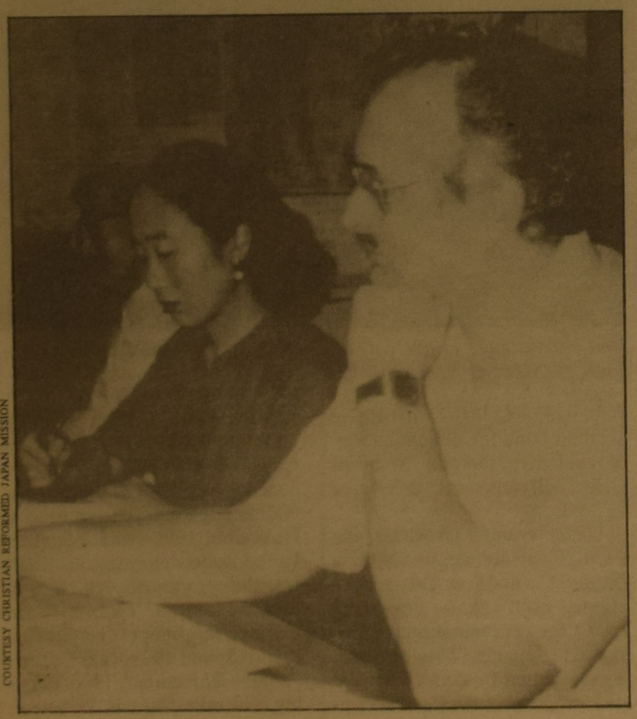
New society promotes Christian education in Japan



COURTESY CHRISTIAN REFORMED JAPAN MISSION

Three of the founders of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Schooling in Japan: from left, Akira Mochizuki, Ula Shibazaki, Larry Spalink.

Alan Doerksen (with files from Christian Reformed World Missions)

TOKYO — In Japan, a country where Christian education is almost non-existent, two Christian Reformed missionaries and two Japanese church leaders have joined forces to start the Society for the Promotion of Christian Schooling in Japan.

Last summer, Richard Sytsma, field director for Christian Reformed World Missions in Japan, and CRWM missionary Larry Spalink, met with Rev. Akiora Mochizuki and Ula Shibazaki of the Reformed Church in Japan to discuss forming the new society. CRWM and the RCJ have worked together for more than 45 years in church development and evangelism.

"My hope is for Japanese Christians to have a biblical worldview," says Shibazaki, a graduate of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., who teaches at a Japanese public school. "A key to this is Christian education. What we Japanese Christians need to do is to apply our beliefs to all areas of our lives. Many of us worry that if we pursue our faith, we may not be able to be successful. We need to have the faith described in Hebrews 11."

"At this point, all members of the society are members of the RCJ, but our activities have been advertised among other evangelical groups, and some interest has been expressed from those quarters," reports Spalink. The society's president, Rev. Yoshioka, is an RCJ pastor who also teaches at a women's junior college and is chairperson of the RCJ's education committee.

Resources and 'Saturday schools'

The founders of the society plan to begin sponsoring lectures on topics such as church and family education and Christian parenting. They also plan workshops for Christian teachers on issues such as how to teach Christianly and incorporate Christian perspectives into teaching.

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News

Heated discussion on euthanasia: council

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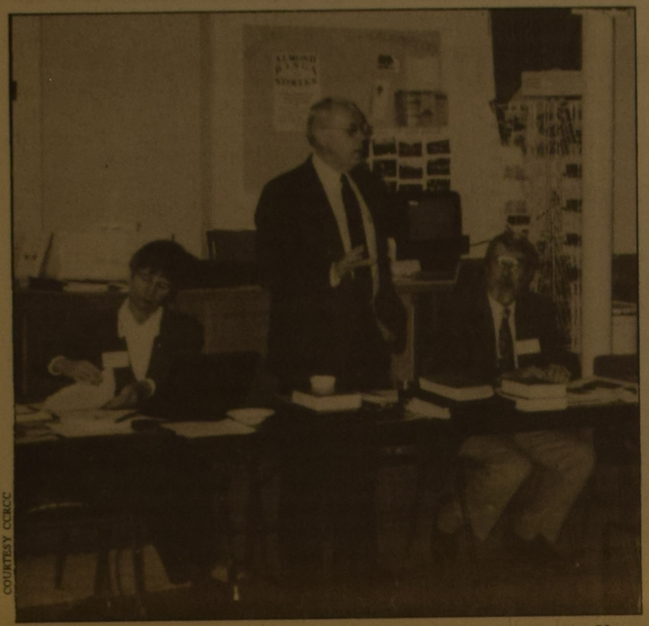
CCC will issue a statement without qualifications. But if some of the churches do not agree with a position, those who do agree will be specifically mentioned as standing behind the statement.

Because the CCC has become a looser coalition, it was felt among delegates at the CCRCC meeting that there can now be a more comfortable place for the Christian Reformed Church (represented by the council), within the CCC. Just as it does in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, council can give a clear witness to the Reformed faith and worldview.



COURTESY CCRCC

The council executive: from left, Nel De Boer (secretary), Henry Wildeboer (chair), Gordon Pols (vice-chair).

Ministries to Natives scrutinized

The council also discussed its supervising of CRC ministries to Natives. The council agreed that a full time co-ordinator for Indian ministries be hired for an initial three-year period. The person appointed to this position would also work at acquainting congregations and classes with these ministries.

In order to carry on these ministries better, the council interim committee (CIC) was instructed to arrange for a discussion paper on the problem of syncretism ("the tendency or effort to reconcile different religious or philosophical beliefs or to absorb some of the tenets of one religion into the system of another" — *Gage Canadian Dictionary*).

CIC should define its understanding of the term, describe syncretism's relationship to the difficulties of such cross-cultural ministries, and present some concrete suggestions as to how to deal with syncretism.

The council also agreed to "an urgent request" to the denominational board of trustees to convene a forum on cross-cultural ministries, including Korean ministries, focusing on culture and worship, and involving, as a minimum, the leaders of the council itself, the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR), CRWRC, First Nations peoples of Canada and Native Americans in the U.S., World Missions and Calvin Seminary.

Because the church wants to be a witness in that secular arena, the council, through its Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG), researches, debates and issues position papers on various social issues, the most volatile of which this year was euthanasia.

CCG 'rapped on knuckles'

The lengthy and sometimes heated discussion of this subject among the 35 delegates present concerned both the contents of the CCG's discussion paper called "Medical Decision and Public Policy Pertaining to the End of Life" and the manner in which it had been released to the federal government.

There was concern among delegates that the paper had already been presented by the CCG to a Senate committee in Ottawa, even though it had not yet been discussed and approved by the council. That might give the impression that the paper presents the Christian Reformed Church's official position on euthanasia, which it doesn't. In fact, the church has never made a pronouncement on euthanasia.

It was noted that the term "euthanasia" itself is somewhat "woolly," capable of meaning different things to different people.

The permissive situation in the Netherlands regarding euthanasia was brought up; the difference between that and what the CCG discussion paper advocates, it was said, lies in the fact that the paper deals, not with intense suffering at any point in life, but with suffering when it occurs at what clearly appears to be near the end of one's life, in which case administering pain-relieving drugs might indeed shorten life. Under current Canadian law, such action might lead to criminal charges being laid.

A set of resolutions was adopted which will release the discussion paper to the churches for "information, instruction and discussion." The resolutions also encourage the CCG to address governments on pressing issues from an integrally biblical perspective; and they instruct the CCG to do all it can to elicit responses to its proposals and to establish a broad consensus before addressing the government.

Internal business

A great amount of the council's time, both in committee and in plenary sessions, was spent discussing changes in the Canadian CRCs' ministry structure which were mandated by Synod 1995. Synod hopes that the Canadian CRCs will achieve greater "ownership of and direction for" the denominational ministries which take place in Canada.

To flesh out proposed changes, a synodical advisory committee had recommended an 11-person task force which would engage in a process of consultation with the Canadian congregations and classes, as well as with denominational agencies and the committees of the CCRCC.

The council agreed to the task force and appointed the following Canadians to serve on it: Frank DeWalle, Ed Vande-Veer, Eileen Van Ginkel, Neil DeKoning, Gordon Pols, Ray Elgersma, Claire Veenstra, Gerrit Bomhof and Ben Vandezande. Two of six Americans nominated by the denominational board of trustees will also serve on the task force; in addition, the CCRCC executive secretary and the denominational executive director of ministries will serve the task force as advisors.

Under synod's proposals, the CCRCC would cease to be a "council" and would reconstitute itself as a governing board for denominational ministries in Canada. This proposal was modified by council so that the proposal now is to constitute a deliberative assembly, called a conference, which will meet annually but will have only 24 delegates, two from each classis. All three offices of the church (ministers, elders and deacons) will be represented in equal numbers (three times eight) at this conference and the process will be such that over a period of three years each classis will have sent two ministers, two elders and two deacons. The conference will be answerable to synod. From the delegates to this conference a board will be elected that meets twice a year — one from each of the 12 classes and a few members at large.

Special meeting next year

Appreciation was expressed for the synodical committee's work on this issue, and the committee's report was accepted — with the changes mentioned earlier.

Among other decisions taken were:

* the council will not reconstitute itself immediately;

* the task force will approach Synod 1996 with an interim report on the revised proposed structure of a "Conference for Canadian Ministries";

* the council will hold a special meeting a year from now in November 1996 (with essentially the same delegates) to finalize the proposals, which will then be sent to each CRC in Canada in time to be studied before Synod 1997;

* the November 1996 meeting will take place in Winnipeg and will, as much as possible, restrict itself to this church structure matter.

COURTESY CCRCC

Delegates engage in lively discussion: from left, John VanderMeulen, Janet DeGroot, Nel De Boer.

For our Calendar of Events, please turn to page 18.

News

Christian schooling part of long-term mission strategy in Japan

...continued from page 1

Another idea the society is considering is promoting "Saturday schools" in which churches could offer supplementary Christian courses on curriculum taught in public schools. The "schools" would meet in church buildings.

"All the founding members place a strong emphasis on the Bible as the standard for life," says Shibazaki. "We formed this society to help ourselves and others practice what we believe.... I want to help Christians build God's Kingdom in Japan and around the world."

Since it was started, the society has been meeting every couple of months to explore what its role should be. Eventually, the society plans to form an institution that could provide Christian curriculum materials and start Christian schools.

Although there were Christian schools in Japan from the first days of mission work there in the late 1800s, they have declined in recent years, explains Spalink. "Many of these schools were self-consciously Reformed in their orientation, though over the years, most of these have had this focus rather thoroughly watered down," he adds.

For example, the RCJ's Sōkei Gakuen school used to offer Christian education from kindergarten to college but now offers only kindergarten. During the 1950s, this school, like many others, experienced great financial difficulty and was forced to shut down its grade school, says Spalink.

Combatting the stampede to succeed

Today, Japanese Christians have few educational options for their children except for secular schools or expensive private schools that focus on material success. The central government controls curriculum through its education ministry and parents have little say over what their children are taught.

Starting the Society for the Promotion of Christian Schooling in Japan is a small but significant first step to resolving Japan's "education problem," says Spalink.

This problem has several facets. One is the strong influence of the government's education ministry, which screens textbooks and promotes the teaching of Japanese mythology, a "white-washed version" of World War II, evolution, and compulsory visits to Shinto shrines, Spalink reports.

Another problem with Japanese schools is pressure to pass entrance exams to well-known universities. This creates an obstacle to forming Christian schools, notes Spalink. "The competition for entrance into university being as infamously fierce as it is, few parents are willing to place their children into unaccredited programs."

To be accredited, schools need to follow strict government regulations. Many former mission schools now follow government demands, although many still offer chapel services and Bible instruction.

A seed today...

"The realization of a full-blown Christian school movement in Japan seems little more than a remote vision today. Yet this small beginning is the seed of what might in God's grace become a powerful force for expanding the kingdom of God in Japan," says Spalink. "All of the CRC missionaries here are highly committed to Christian education as the duty of Christian parents and see Christian day schools as a strategic key in raising up a new God-fearing and Kingdom-productive generation."

It is because of these convictions that the promotion of Christian schooling has been written into the long-term strategy of CRWM in Japan, Spalink explains. Several CRWM missionaries teach English classes as part of their outreach work. "English is a long-used strategy for making contacts and providing a service to society," says Spalink.

At present there are six CRWM missionaries doing church-planting work in Japan. Another missionary works as a high school teacher and curriculum co-ordinator at the Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ), which provides Christian schooling for missionary children. This is a school that Christian Reformed missionaries helped to found in the 1950s. Christian Reformed World Missions also has six associate members who do teaching work with other agencies.

Survival in the wild, wild East

Eric Hagt

Perhaps the theory of evolution is unacceptable to some people, but Darwin certainly had a point when he developed his theory of "the survival of the fittest." He may even have been thinking of China when he proposed it. Many aspects of Chinese life, from traffic laws to rest-room queues, epitomize Darwinian survival techniques.

Surviving in Beijing includes dodging reckless motorists and elbowing one's way onto a jam-packed bus or streetcar. The reason is simple — overcrowding through overpopulation. The result is an every-man-for-himself mentality, or more aptly put: "every man for his life."

Easy to be laid-back

The Chinese think of Canadians as laid-back, courteous people who live in an orderly, convenience-laden society. Though this is a stereotype, most Canadian motorists will naturally yield to pedestrians. While in Canada, I frequently see people letting elderly women move in front of them at the grocery check-out. No big deal, right? It's easy to be benevolent and considerate when it means only a few extra minutes of your time.

That's not how things work in China! Orderly queuing is relatively foreign concept to the average Chinese. I've happened upon the odd chivalrous act, but they are few and far between. The sheer masses of people make a simple task like accessing a latrine a truly harrowing experience. The stronger and faster yield to no one and are inevitably the first to relieve themselves.

These universal laws of the survival of the fittest have also been promoted to the streets. Beijing traffic is a veritable chaos. Even though fewer than 10 per cent of Beijingers own licenses to drive motor vehicles, traffic jams are decidedly the rule rather than the exception. Add to this the approximately five million bicycles and a couple of million pedestrians to boot, and you end up with what one friend so accurately described as "murder and mayhem." "Murder is not to be taken literally, but if one isn't vigilant to the dangers of Beijing traffic, the threat of life and limb cannot be discounted.

No law

The law of the street is ... well, there is no law. That's the whole problem. Red lights, stop signs and policemen stationed at every intersection are unanimously ignored. Vulnerable pedestrians and precariously balanced cyclists are no match for a Lexus, Mercedes or even dump truck.

All of this seems to be in stark contradiction to the altruistic values propagated by the communist government. Chinese are known to be warm people with a strong sense of comraderie. These social mores still exist, but I dare say they are reserved for sitting around the fireplace when the nuclear family bonds over a cup of hot Jasmine tea.

In the morning on the street, it's back to the survival of the fittest. And for those who may consider this exaggeration on my part, I invite you to China. You will experience for yourself that what Darwin so poignantly theorized about has come to fruition in this rather large anthill of humanity.

Eric Hagt is a Canadian medical student living in China.

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Editorial

A Jewish theologian can teach us a few things about justice

When Rabbi Dow Marmur of the Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto spoke at a Nov. 2 event sponsored by the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, he brought a uniquely Jewish and biblical perspective to the discussion of government cutbacks in Ontario. We want to highlight some of the things he said in this editorial, things that may help us gain a better view of what is at stake when deficits are being reduced through cutbacks in social spending.

According to Rabbi Marmur, the Hebrew prophets were partisan. They took the side of the poor and the disadvantaged. He's right. One has only to quote Amos 2: 7 — "They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground" — to confirm what the rabbi says. We find a similar side-taking in James 2, where the Apostle James writes that Christians should not discriminate against the poor because God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith, and it is the rich who exploit people and drag them into court. It's almost in keeping with Scripture to expect those who have riches and power to take advantage of the poor, although one would not want to set in motion a reverse discrimination against those who have wealth. The Hebrew prophets, said Marmur, judged society by the way it dealt with the downtrodden.

Marmur quotes Ezekiel 16:49 to indicate that a significant part of the sin of Sodom was that its citizens were "overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and the needy." This passage is often overlooked when we Christians talk about the sins of Sodom. Too often we stress the sexual immorality of Sodom (we even use the term "sodomy" to indicate immoral actions) and transfer that single-minded focus to an evaluation of our society. Many Christians are more concerned about sexual sins in today's society than about injustice towards the poor.

Charity and justice

Marmur also talks about the communal responsibility of a society to share some of its wealth. This, he says, is an act of justice. Quoting Meir Tamari, a Jewish ethicist, Marmur writes, "Voluntary sharing of wealth in response to the claims of the poor and weak is charity, but compulsory participation in the communal funds to provide these needs is an act of justice. Non-participation in such funding becomes tantamount to theft, either from the recipients of the funding or from the other participants who now have to provide a greater share."

"Bringing a can of food to the food bank on the way to the office may be an act of individual charity," says Marmur, but it does not replace acts of collective justice.

Again, Marmur's words act as a corrective to the notion held by so many who tend to think that poverty ought to be met with a response of charity rather than one of justice. Those of us who are not poor do well to realize how much of our wealth depends not on our own efforts or strength but on the way we have, by God's grace, been placed in the scheme of things. We have had certain advantages and opportunities that so many who are poor have never had. It's a matter of justice, therefore, to remove some of these inequalities and to share the fruits of those advantages. Especially today, when employment is no longer a guarantee, those who work owe part of their rewards to those who can't find work. "Rather than regarding wealth as evidence of our own achievements due to our own merits, we are called to look upon it as a sign of divine grace, bestowed on us in order to call us to responsibility," says Marmur.

God-less sense

Marmur is rightly critical of the Ontario government's plans to cut taxes at the same time it is cutting social spending. It gives the impression that the poor have to pay for the deficit while the better off get more money in their pockets. This, indeed, is the most cynical part of the Ontario government's attempt to decrease the deficit. We know that the Harris government prides itself on keeping all its promises, but should a government keep a promise when it becomes apparent that it was wrong in making it? Surely we can forgive politicians for admitting that they made a mistake.

The most serious charge Marmur levels against the Common Sense Revolution is that it leaves out God. He reflects on the "prospect of doom that comes from God-lessness, of the threat of disintegration when common sense is elevated to the level of God sense, and when religious institutions are only recognized as benevolent do-gooders and told to pick up the pieces from the damage done by the government."

Not all are victims

Much as we appreciate these insights given by Rabbi Marmur, we would be amiss if we did not express some reservations about the action undertaken by the religious leaders on Nov. 2.

What we found missing in Marmur's analysis is a recognition that not all poor people in our society are poor because of circumstances beyond their control. Marmur and his fellow religious leaders tend to portray all poor people as victims and the government as doing the damage. But that's too easy. Some people are poor because of bad choices in their lives. Some people spend $40 a month of their welfare cheque on cigarettes or bingo. Some parents are angry with the welfare system for enabling their rebellious children to live an irresponsible lifestyle: their children get into drugs, drop out of school, make no attempt to find work and count on the state to provide a monthly cheque.

One of the key problems in the present welfare system is the lack of accountability. How can the biblical principle "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10) be applied?

Secondly, we must not give the impression that the Harris government has completely abandoned the poor when the amount of social assistance compares favorably with that given in other provinces. Besides, we must continue to struggle with the question of how far a state should go in providing welfare for its people. The history of communism should teach us that well-intentioned statism easily turns into cruel oppression.

Timely and helpful words

Thirdly, we would be a lot happier if a group of Christian economists would address the Harris government, rather than a group of church leaders. Prophetic words are needed at all times, but who's going to help the government turn around its slide into debt? Where are the specific proposals that will make us more just toward future Canadians?

Which leads us to another question: where were these religious leaders when previous governments were running the country and provinces into the big deficit hole we now find ourselves in? Was there no word or revelation for the times of irresponsible spending?

Nevertheless, the overall prophetic message in Marmur's speech is clear: Individual charity does not replace societal justice, and those who love God need to take sides with the poor. This is a much-needed corrective to the individualistic and selfish approach taken by so many who consider themselves worthy of their wealth. **BW**

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Letters

Shades of gnosticism and pacifism

Two articles in the October 27 issue caught my attention: Nick Loenen's "Don't ask me to shake hands during the service" and John Stronks' "The body is part of the image of God."

Nick Loenen does not want to shake hands during the service so his problem could perhaps be solved in a very simple way: before the minister pronounces God's greeting, that is, before the official service starts, people could shake hands.

Maybe Nick is not pleased with that either, but he could keep in mind an aspect he did not discuss in his article: the worship service is also a fellowship service. Fellowship is more than sitting next to someone. It means worshipping together, not as x-number of individuals. How that individualism can be overcome in our churches is not always clear, but handshaking may be a step in the right direction. Does Nick's emphasis reveal a touch of the Enlightenment's individualism?

He also states that "worship is an activity of the soul, of the inner person." Unquestionably the inner person plays an important role in worship, but it seems to me that we should not stop there. We do not worship just with our souls, but with our whole beings. To love God with our whole being also means to worship God with our whole being. Is the down-playing of the material side of the human being perhaps a residue of gnosticism? Perhaps Nick can do some further thinking about the way we worship.

Not a simple issue

Stronks' articles was very informative, but also raises a question for me. Stronks makes the value of human life absolute. Many pacifists have made the same point. However, the Christian Reformed Church has never held a pacifist position. Can we hold an absolute position on human life in regards to euthanasia and at the same time a relative position on war?

Personally, I have no difficulty with Stronks' suggestion that the value of human life is absolute. Is John Stronks willing to hold the same position in regards to war? If not, should he expect the CRC to be consistent? If the CRC wants to be consistent it will either have to reject Stronks' position or reject its adherence to the "just war" theory.

The issue may not be as straightforward as Stronks' articles seemed to imply.

Bert den Boggende
Fairview, Alta.

Slippery slope classis

Having read the article on how Classis Grand Rapids East compromised on how to minister to gays, I'm concerned about how "soft" we have become on what we normally call "sin."

Having studied the booklet *A Cause For Division?* by professor John W. Cooper, I read on p. 9 that "separation from the CRC by those whose consciences cannot accept the decision to open all offices to women would even constitute a sin against the church and its Lord" and also that "the case for women's ordination will not take us to the edge of the dreaded slippery slope." But when it comes to homosexuality, we dare not make a firm statement that homosexual practice is sin.

For years, Classis Grand Rapids East has been in the forefront in pushing the women in office issue. Is it now doing *this* to the CRC?

We have always dared to say that what's happening in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands (GKN) cannot happen here. But after reading this, who are we kidding?

Whatever Classis Grand Rapids East decides will be pushed into the CRC, since many of the so-called leaders in the CRC are members of this classis.

Henry Amsinga
Thamesford, Ont.

Do animals receive glorified bodies?

I was wondering if I had understood Bert Hielema correctly in his column "God didn't create 'commodities'" (Nov. 3). I'm especially talking about the last paragraph.

Bert writes: "To sum all this up: I think the root of the problem lies with an erroneous concept of redemption. With the crucifixion not only are we humans reconciled to God, but all of creation is redeemed. Are we really called "to live our lives in awareness that all creatures — chickens, pigs, cows, calves not excluded — participate in the divine salvation and are made new along with us"?

Does this mean, according to Bert Hielema, that they all will receive glorified bodies? This is something which I cannot believe immediately. I would first like to hear biblical proof and support.

Who can answer my question?

Enno Ennema
Chatham, Ont.

Response:

Bert Hielema, who's staying in North Carolina at the moment, told us by telephone that he believes that animals will receive glorified bodies and that he bases this on Isaiah 61. There we read: "Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth.... The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox."

Based on this and other passages, Reformed theology has always viewed Christ's saving work as having redemptive implications for all of creation, not just human individual "souls."

Editor

Constitution requires government to promote equity for all

The federal government has the constitutional responsibility to prevent the emergence of a balkanized Canada — a nation with different classes of social citizenship depending on what the various provincial governments do by way of social services.

I believe we must all insist on enforceable *national* standards that will ensure *equal* citizenship rights in all the provinces and territories. We may not allow the break-up of our basic social programs that have been an essential part of what makes Canada unique.

National standards promote equity

Canada's social programs have helped achieve a certain national unity between individual Canadians and between regions of Canada. Equity is promoted by national standards in social programs that ensure everyone's access to comparable levels of public service. Equity is promoted between regions equalization payments.

The federal government has a responsibility for national equity which is outlined in sections 36.1 and 36.2 of the Constitution.

Section 36.1 says Parliament and the government of Canada (and the provincial legislatures) are committed to:

(a) promoting equal opportunities for the well-being of Canadians;

(b) furthering economic development to reduce disparity in opportunities; and

(c) providing essential public services of reasonable quality to all Canadians.

Especially now that most of the provincial premiers are demanding more provincial power without showing any real concern for the negative impact their narrow, selfish demands may have on our national cohesion and the well-being of all Canadians, I pray that MPs will demonstrate their constitutional obligation to work for effective, enforceable *national* standards that will ensure fiscal equity across Canada.

Gerald Vandezande
Toronto, Ont.

Johannes' uncle is no longer critical

In reply to Johannes DeViet writing about his ["very Reformed" and very critical] uncle (CC, Nov. 17), I would like to say: we must not allow Satan to muddle our thinking. There is no imperfection or unhappiness in heaven.

If Johannes' uncle believed in God and the saving work of Jesus Christ, and in his heart accepted Jesus as his Savior, then he is now in heaven; the Bible says so.

We believe that [when we enter heaven] a miraculous transformation takes place: all our sin and the consequences thereof have gone; all negative feelings about others have gone; we can only sing praise to God — there is no room for all that earthly stuff.

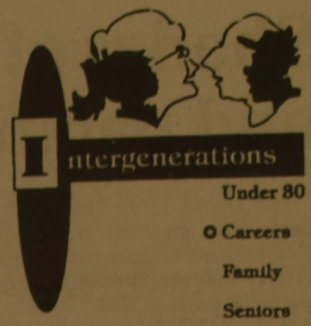
If God, the Creator of heaven and earth, has remembered our sin no more, how then can we remember our sin and our judgment of others? We'll be free from all that. The change will indeed be (almost) unbelievable.

Dear Johannes, ask the Lord, as I must, to grant you and me the grace to just be able to believe and accept it.

George Rhebergen
Belleville, Ont.

On the job with herdsman Al Boonstra

Does being a Christian make a difference?



Nandy Heule

Dairy Guide, *a leading agricultural magazine, says it serves Canada's milk* producers, *not just dairy farmers.*

Dairy farmers produce a product they need to sell at a fair market price. Al Boonstra, a farmer in Frankford, Ont., agrees that farming today is more a business than a lifestyle. And he adds that the trends to focus on the "bottom line," to computerize farming operations, and to professionalize labor relations will continue to change Canadian farms.

However, Boonstra, a father of five, says that the business of farming is so intrinsically bound up with living on the farm that it's also a life.

"Sounds a lot like being in a parsonage," quipped this reporter, whose husband will soon return to parish ministry. Says Boonstra, "Yes, but you can always shoot a cow if she becomes too much trouble...."

Acticulate, funny, and obviously hard-working, Al Boonstra is one good reason for taxpayers to fight for the survival of Canada's family farms. So next time any of us city slickers complain about the price of milk, butter or cheese, let's praise God for its availability, and pray for the men and women who get up at 4:45 a.m. to milk those cows.

PHOTOS COURTESY AL BOONSTRA

Al Boonstra at work at the Hoftyzer Dairy Farm

Name: *Al Boonstra*
Age: *Thirty-something*
Employer: *The (A&G) Hoftyzer Dairy Farm*
Location: *Frankford, Ont.*
Job: *Assistant herdsman*

How did you become a farm laborer?

I didn't grow up on a farm, but when I was a teenager my parents moved from Hamilton's outskirts into the country. And, like my friends and other neighborhood teens, I started working farm jobs during summer holidays.

After high school graduation, I went to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., for two years and worked summers on a dairy farm in Caledonia, Mich. I started working full time, year-round in 1977, without any formal agricultural training.

I'm now a member of a government committee mandated to find ways to educate farm employees and "professionalize" labor relations in agriculture. There is a lack of skilled farm labor because fewer kids are growing up on farms.

The Ontario Agricultural Human Resources Committee is trying to address this problem by exploring, for example, how farmers could participate in formal apprenticeship programs. We're also discussing the need for employee handbooks and employer manuals that could include job descriptions, regulations and business procedures.

Personally, I learned in the school of hard knocks, and there's a lot to be said for just doing and learning on the job. However, through the years, I've come to realize that an element of formal training can be beneficial.

What is your typical day like?

This farm milks around 75 registered Holsteins and it's a high producing herd. The average farm in this area milks probably around 45 to 50 cows, but my bosses — Albert and Gerard Hoftyzer, who are brothers — aren't into this business "to be average!"

One of my employers starts milking at 4:45 a.m., I come into the barn at 5:30; I get to work and my boss goes back to sleep for a couple of hours. So we both get up early. This is to promote regularity in the cows by sticking to exact 12-hour cycles. I have breakfast at 7:30 and continue regular farm chores until around 9:00.

After the morning break, I observe the cows for about 45 minutes and watch if they are in heat. A cow goes through a heat cycle that lasts several days, but there is only a 12 to 18-hour window of opportunity to have her bred.

It takes experience to recognize a cow that's in "standing heat": first she becomes more alert, with ears perked up; next she starts jumping other cows; finally, she's being jumped and ready to be artificially inseminated.

During this fertilization process "cleanliness is godliness, rather than just next to it." I thaw frozen bull semen, and with the help of a special gun-like tool, deposit it into the cow. The animal normally tolerates the procedure and I can complete the task without assistance.

Most of my days are taken by regular farm chores, including planting and harvesting a variety of crops, including corn and cereal crops for cattle feed. During summer months we also have around 10 kids running around doing chores, and they need guidance.

What do you like best?

The seasonal variety.

What do you like or dislike about your job?

People wonder sometimes how I can tolerate the long hours this job requires. My stock answer is, "if I worried about long hours, I wouldn't be doing this." People around here commute two hours to Toronto every day — they can have it, as far as I'm concerned.

The job I truly hate is a chore that comes up a few times every winter: we clip the cows' hide around the flanks and tail to cut away dried manure. The animals aren't used to this procedure and I've made some enemies!

How does being a Christian make a difference for you on the job?

I'm happy with my job because it brings me close to creation. God gave us a task to do. Some people see work as a curse, but I don't see it that way. When you've just delivered a calf, and its mother is still breathing next to it, you get a warm, fuzzy feeling. Really, it's a miracle every time. Christians are asked to integrate their faith with whatever they do. We do our work to the glory of God.

What about making a living?

My earnings are adequate:

there's bread and butter on the table, clothes in the closet and our Christian education bills are paid in time. I get different perks than the person in the factory. For example, we get milk and meat, and the boss pays our utilities.

Nandy Heule, a St. Catharines writer, wonders if Dutch cheese is made from Canadian milk.

For this column, CC would like to interview a Christian scientist (research) or anyone working in the computer industry (especially software development). Please contact the writer at (905) 988-6174.

Don't Forget...

It's time to extend Christmas and/or New Year's greetings through C.C.

Starting with the Christmas issue **(December 8)**, and continuing with the **December 15 and 22** issues, we plan to reserve a special section in the classified pages for **your season's greetings.** Deadline for the Christmas issue is November 29! Kindly formulate your greetings to family and friends now (the message should not exceed 40 words) and send it in today, **enclosing payment of $20.00 as well.**

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Film review

Media/Arts

Canadians may enjoy this *American President*

Marian Van Til

The American President

Rated PG
Stars Michael Douglas, Annette Bening, Martin Sheen, Michael J. Fox, David Paymer
Written by Aaron Sorkin
Directed by Rob Reiner

C.C. FILES

Michael Douglas stars as the widowed American president and Annette Bening is his environmental lobbyist girlfriend.

A question about this movie which may immediately occur to a Canadian is: Am I going to be interested in, much less enjoy, a story called "The American President"? I think the answer will be in the affirmative, for several reasons.

This is, first of all, a love story, and a very funny one at that. If one were a screenwriter and wanted to find an original and contemporary setting for a comedic story about love blossoming and flourishing despite immense obstacles, a choice with obvious potential would be envisioning a widowed American president falling in love with an environmental lobbyist.

Never alone

The President, of course, lives in fortress-like surroundings; his every move is followed, if not orchestrated, by staffers and aides; and he — and whomever he associates with — rarely escapes the long lenses and sharp pens of the press, and thus, the public. (The story clearly wouldn't have worked had the subject been, say, a Canadian Prime Minister, who is spared the intense isolation and scrutiny which surrounds an American president.)

Though the love story is central, the behind-the-scenes glimpse at American politics (fairly accurate though sanitized) will intrigue and perhaps surprise many viewers, whether Americans or Canadians.

Director Rob Reiner and his friends are clearly Democrats who are sympathetic to their real-life President. This film president would be a dream come true for the U.S., calculated to be a cross between the best parts of JFK and Clinton: he governs decisively, has integrity (mostly), a sense of humor, is charismatic, sensitive and good-looking, yet not full of himself. (Perhaps the film makers are portraying their ideal president; or the one they hoped Mr. Clinton would be.)

Sparks fly

The film takes a couple of obvious pot-shots at the current conservative Republican Congress, and the villain who attacks the President's character is a senator from Kansas, a not-too-subtle allusion to Senator Bob Dole. The press are also vilified for their fixation on getting juicy stories. And a juicy story it is when the widowed president takes a girlfriend. Especially when she stays overnight at the White House.

Michael Douglas as the President and Annette Bening as the feisty, intelligent girlfriend are virtually perfect in their roles. There's a chemistry between them that creates both sparks and sparkle.

The supporting characters are more than peripheral. Canadian Michael J. Fox is particularly good as the President's frenetic speech writer/aid. Fox's approach is a nice foil to Martin Sheen's understated performance as the President's much more dignified chief-of-staff and best friend.

The story works best (and is funniest) when the President and the woman are getting to know each other and the President wants to act like an ordinary guy courting a woman he's interested in. But when you're President, even a little thing like sending flowers is a major ordeal, at least when you want to do it yourself.

In such scenes, the film emulates the best love stories of the black-and-white era. It's disappointing, then, from a moral point of view, and unfortunate from a dramatic point of view, that this modern film puts the protagonists in bed together not long after they meet.

On-screen restraint

On-screen, though, there are only a couple of demure kisses, a restraint not seen in many current films. Despite the implied sex and the modern political jockeying, there's a kind of good-natured, old-fashioned feel about this movie. That's because it's not devoid of all subtlety (it implies more than it shows); and because it assumes an intelligent audience which will appreciate well-written dialogue and well-mannered graciousness.

New tool may help parents supervise Internet use

BOSTON, Mass. (EP) — New technical standards unveiled October 30 are expected to aid the creation of software to help parents control their children's access to online services. The Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) standards are also expected to work with independent ratings systems to help parents know to what their kids are being exposed on the Internet.

Prototypes for the new standards were shown at the Internet World 95 trade show. One rated content by age-appropriateness; parents enter a child's age and the program restricts access to sites that are too "mature" for the child. Another system rates Internet sites on a numerical scale for violence, language and nudity, then allows parents to use a control panel to set access levels for each child.

The standards are being promoted by a veritable "who's who" of computer industry leaders, including Microsoft, Apple, IBM, AT&T, America Online, CompuServe and Prodigy. Independent creation of standards is an effort to avoid government-imposed content restrictions.

Educational and hazardous

Though the Internet has significant educational potential, it can also expose children to inappropriate and harmful material, experts warn. At Britain's prestigious annual science festival of the British Association, Professor Harold Thimbleby said, "Some people see the Internet and the World Wide Web as an important step toward democracy, education and peace, and of benefit to everyone from children to entire nations." However, he said, "The reality is rather different from the vision. The Internet brings pornography and computer viruses; it tells you how to take drugs and make bombs."

Thimbleby added, "The Internet has been called a global electronic village. If so, most of it is a heavily used red-light district." He noted that the most frequently used "search" terms entered by Internet users relate to pornography.

In September, government agents arrested more than a dozen customers of America Online, including a daycare centre operator, for using computers to distribute child pornography. The two-year undercover investigation included searches of 120 homes and offices, and is expected to lead to additional arrests. Others were taken into custody after trying to engage in sexual acts with undercover agents who were posing as children on the computer network.

A few bad apples

Steve Case, president of America Online, said his company contacted federal authorities after members pointed out activities which appeared to be related to child pornography. "Although it is disheartening, the fact is that any community with more than 3.5 million citizens will have its share of illegal activity," Case said.

U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno says policing of cyberspace will continue: "We are not going to permit exciting new technology to be misused to exploit and injure children."

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Church

Mission Aviation Fellowship finds new tribe in Irian Jaya

IRIAN JAYA, Indonesia (EP) — A nomadic tribe previously isolated from the majority of the world has been discovered in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, by representatives of Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF).

Pilot Dennis Bergstrazer, national church leader Oto Kobak, and two translators discovered the Tookeni tribe while flying in a helicopter in the southern lowlands of Irian Jaya. Landing the helicopter on a sandbar, the party established contact with the chief and nine other Tookeni men.

For four years, an area church has attempted to contact the group, but tribal disputes over wife-stealing had prevented amicable contact from the outside. The Tookenis greeted the helicopter party with friendly handshakes and hugs, an MAF report said.

Bergstrazer asked one of the men if there were any fish in the river. One tribesman, afraid the missionaries would take all the fish, replied, "No. They're all gone." That particular Tookeni apparently had had some contact with the outside world, because he spoke limited Indonesian, the report added.

As the missionaries flew further down the river, a number of other Tookeni nomads were located, but the tribespeople would run away as the helicopter would attempt to turn around.

The missionaries estimate that there are more than 800 Tookeni in the southern lowlands. MAF plans to continue to arrange friendly encounters with the group.

The report concluded, "There is great enthusiasm on the part of the national churches to complete the task of evangelizing the unreached people groups of Irian Jaya."

Church membership declines in United Kingdom

LONDON (REC) — The churches of the United Kingdom are experiencing a net loss of about 200 members every day, according to a research organization. Christian Research, which has just published a handbook of UK churches, reports that 200 new members join, 200 leave, and another 200 die every day. Overall church membership has declined some five per cent over the last four years.

Some churches have continued growing, mainly the Orthodox, charismatic and Pentecostal churches. The Church of England continues as the largest church. Almost 30 per cent of the babies in the UK are baptized into the Anglican Church.

Although an estimated 25 million people in the UK have been baptized as Anglicans, there are only 1.4 million people on the electoral rolls of the Church of England. On the Sunday the survey was taken, about 900,000 attended worship services in the Church of England. The Church of Scotland had about 750,000 attending.

The Roman Catholic Church has also suffered declines in attendance. In the whole UK, attendance has fallen by nine per cent from four years ago. The situation is more severe in Scotland, however, where the Catholic attendance has fallen by 13 per cent, to an average 246,000 persons.

Some smaller churches reported growth of 18 to 28 per cent over the past four years. That growth, however, was not enough to offset the decline in larger, traditional churches.

Dutch church breaks ties with CRC in North America

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (REC) — The conservative Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (CGKN) has decided to sever its ties with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC).

Three issues were raised by the CGKN report to its October synod. It objected to what it perceives to be the CRC's view of the authority of the Bible, to the CRC's allowing women in church office, and to the CRC's relation with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN).

The CGKN has sent delegates to the CRC synods for the last three years, but ecumenical deputy Paul Den Butter says his church's "expressions of deep concern made no difference."

The CRC, in turn, sent two persons to the CGKN synod. These delegates tried to explain that the reports on the CRC were one-sided. They argued that the deviations from traditional orthodoxy in the CRC were not serious ones. Relations with the GKN were qualified, they said, and did not contain automatic pulpit and table fellowship. Their words, however, appeared to have little impact on the CGKN synod, which voted 42 to 10 for the separation.

Although formal ties have existed between the two churches only since 1980, they have roots in the same 19th century separation movement (*afscheiding*).

The CGKN was founded in the first half of the 19th century, just a few decades before the CRC was formed in the United States. In the 1890s, most of the CGKN joined with other churches leaving the original Dutch Reformed Church (NHK), and created the GKN. A remnant of the CGKN persisted, however, and today forms a 75,000 member church in the Netherlands.

REC releases report on uniqueness of Christ

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (REC) — The Reformed Ecumencial Council (REC) now has available its study report *The Unique Person and Work of Christ*. The report is divided into sections of reflection and testimony. It covers several aspects of Christ's uniqueness, including his role in salvation, as unifier of church and world, his unique resurrection and life, and his role as the manifestation of truth and righteousness.

A brief testimony proposed for adoption by next year's REC assembly is divided into six sections: Christ, our only Savior; Christ, our only Mediator; Christ, our only Teacher; Christ, our only Liberator; Christ, our only Hope; and Christ our Joy.

The report was prepared for the 1996 REC Assembly and will be sent to all member churches, delegates and fraternal organizations.

Other individuals who would like a copy may write to the REC secretariat for a copy. Please enclose $2.50 US to cover costs.

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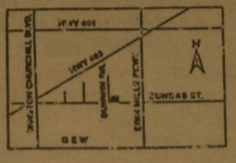

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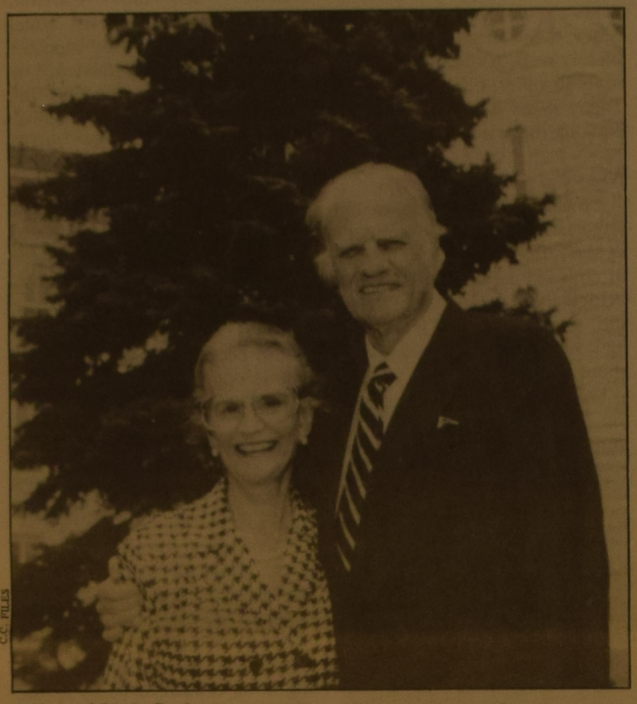
Church

Billy Graham announces plans for future of his ministry

Son Franklin will succeed him



CC. FILES

Billy and Ruth Graham

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (BGEA) — Billy Graham celebrated his 77th birthday on November 7 in Florida at an annual Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) board of directors meeting and affirmed that he will continue as the chairperson and chief executive officer of this organization which he founded in 1950.

Franklin Graham, son of Billy and Ruth Graham, was elected to serve as the first vice-chairperson — a newly created position with direct succession to become chairperson and CEO, should his father become incapacitated. The action settled the question of who will succeed Graham.

Billy Graham said, "Franklin was selected by the board, and as a father I am both proud of his capacity for leadership and humbled in gratitude to the Lord's blessing on him."

Billy Graham's schedule for 1996 includes crusades in Australia, New Zealand, Minneapolis and Charlotte, N.C. He also announced that his memoirs will be completed by the fall of 1996. In addition, he has accepted several major international media interviews in the United States and other countries.

Rev. Cliff Barrows remains as the vice-chairperson of the BGEA and the program director for all of Graham's crusades, continuing a 50-year partnership in ministry with Billy Graham. Barrows said, "I rejoice in God's leadership in the direction taken today by the board, and I consider it a great privilege to continue to stand with Billy and Franklin in the ongoing ministry of the BGEA with the tremendous opportunities which lie ahead."

For now, Franklin Graham will continue his ministry in Samaritan's Purse and World Medical Mission, headquartered in Boone, N.C., but will conduct eight to 10 crusades for the BGEA in 1996.

Franklin Graham reacted to the decision saying, "I am committed to doing whatever I can to support my father so that he can continue to do the work that God has called him to do. I accept this position in order to help him and to take some of the responsibility off his shoulders."

Thirty shekels of silver

Al Wolters
CHAPTER & VERSE

"Then I said to them, 'If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.' And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then the Lord said to me, 'Cast it into the treasury' — the lordly price at which I was paid off by them." (Zech. 11:12-13, RSV)

These verses are part of the so-called "Shepherd Allegory" of Zechariah 11, one of the most difficult passages in the entire Old Testament. In it the prophet is commanded by God to play the role of a shepherd (symbolizing God), who subsequently has a falling out with his flock (symbolizing Israel). After his first month of employment, the shepherd decides to leave his flock to their own devices, and makes arrangements to be paid for his month's work. His employers give him 30 shekels of silver — a payment which is later re-enacted in the story of Judas' betrayal in the New Testament.

Although there are many puzzling aspects to this Shepherd's Allegory, one thing is clear: the wages paid to the shepherd are 30 shekels, and this amount is called a "lordly price." Most Bible commentators think that 30 shekels is really a very low wage, so that "lordly price"must be understood as an ironic or sarcastic expression. It is really an insult to the shepherd (and by implication God) to offer him such a paltry sum. Almost all modern commentators (including John Calvin) interpret the 30 shekels of Zechariah 11 in this way. For support of this position, they often cite Exodus 21:32, where the law of Moses stipulates that the owner of an ox which has killed a slave must pay the slave's master 30 shekels. Doesn't that mean that the shepherd in Zechariah 11 is being treated as no better than a slave?

Of course this does not follow at all. There is no reason to believe that Zechariah is alluding to Exodus, and in any case the amount paid in recompense for a gored slave could still be a very high month's wage for a free laborer. Some commentators admit this point, but then go on to argue that "30 shekels" should not be taken literally, but rather as an idiomatic expression meaning "trifling sum." However, the linguistic evidence which they adduce for this (if it exists at all) is very weak.

A 'golden handshake'

Oddly enough, commentators have never asked what the regular wage of a shepherd is likely to have been in Zechariah's day. As it happens, there is a good deal of documentary evidence that is available on this question, and it turns out that 30 shekels for a month's work would have been a very high wage. Most ordinary workers in the Persian empire at that time were paid the equivalent of only one shekel a month, For them 30 shekels would have represented two and a half years pay. This means that the original readers of Zechariah's prophecy would haver understood that the 30 shekels were indeed a "lordly price" — a very handsome remuneration for one month's work.

As a result, we get a very different picture of what is going on in these verses. The shepherd's employers are trying not to fob him off with a paltry wage, but rather to *buy* him off with a princely wage. They want to get rid of him at any price. The 30 shekels represent a kind of "golden handshake", a very attractive severance package by which an employee is induced to leave early the employment which he or she was contractually bound to fulfil. In the context of the Shepherd Allegory of Zechariah 11, this means that God is being offered an enormous sum in order not to fulfil his covenantal obligations toward Israel. Then, as now, people will go to great lengths to flee from the God of the covenant.

Al Wolters teaches Bible and classical languages at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. He recently presented a scholarly paper on the 30 shekels of Zechariah 11.

Saved from quake, razed by fire

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (EP) — A church that survived San Francisco's 1906 earthquake was destroyed by fire November 5. St. Paulus Lutheran Church was a wooden reproduction of the cathedral in Chartes, France. It celebrated its centennial last year.

Psalter Hymnals falling apart?

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Feature

Much evidence of evil and of God's grace

A remarkable Christian counsellor terminates her career

Bert Witvoet

Mary VanderVennen is retiring as psychotherapist and director of professional services for Christian Counselling Services (CCS) in Toronto at the end of this year. Her retirement will coincide with her turning 65 in February. She's looking forward to it, too. "Old age is so much fun, it's a pity you have to wait so long to get there," she says with a big grin on her face.

But that's not the only reason she's throwing out the couch. Although she has enjoyed counselling and feels "truly alive" when she's working things out with a person or a couple, she is also getting tired — tired of responsibility, tired of the evil that emerges in counselling sessions, tired of the hypocrisy in the church.

Hospitals a dead-end

Mary started her working career teaching nurses after graduating with a BS in nursing from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. That was in 1953. A year later she and her husband, Robert, moved to Washington, D.C., and then to Jackson, Miss. For the next 14 years she stayed home, looking after their three children: Mark, Paul and Kathy.

In 1959 the family moved to Chicago, where Robert took up a teaching position at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights. Mary went back to school in 1968, studying for and obtaining a master's degree in psychiatric nursing at St. Xavier College. She then attended the Family Institute in Chicago to study marriage and family counselling, after which she spent two years as a family therapist at a veteran's hospital in Chicago. The experience left her convinced that a hospital career was a dead-end street. "Physicians have complete control and the bureaucracy is stifling," she remarks.

Invitation to the dance

In 1974, the VanderVennens moved to Toronto so that Robert could work for the Institute for Christian Studies. It was here that Ken Van Wyk, a counsellor for Christian Counseling Services, invited Mary to join himself and Louis Martin on the CCS staff. Mary did join them and the rest is CCS history — until the end of this year.

Not that initially Mary was all that eager to join a Christian counseling group. Earlier contacts with the Jay Adams school of Christian counselling made her recoil because of what she terms its moralistic, judgmental and simplistic approach to emotional problems. But she noticed that CCS was different. "CCS has given me the freedom to develop in all kinds of ways," she says. "It has offered me the freedom of a private practice with the benefit of good colleagues who take a holistic approach to counselling."

BERT WITVOET

Changing times

Since that time, CCS has grown and now employs 10 counsellors, some full- and some part-time. Other things have changed, too.

Twenty-five years ago, nobody was talking about abuse, says Mary. But today, "most of the clients we're working with have suffered severe abuse, both sexual and emotional."

Mary herself has done ground-breaking work in the area of multiple personalities, a condition, she says, which is almost 100 per cent a result of abuse. In 1984 the *Toronto Star* featured her and a client in "The 50 personalities of Debra".

According to the *Star* story, Debra, a 22-year-old woman, "had been hospitalized, given shock treatments and seen countless doctors, psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists. For some reason, none of them understood. She couldn't open up to them and she didn't really know why. She decided to try one more time. A friend of hers put her in touch with the Christian Counselling Services and she met VanderVennen. It turned out that VanderVennen was the only person Debra felt she could trust enough to tell her story."

"Before she met Debra, VanderVennen had never treated a multiple personality," the *Star* continues. "In fact, when she started to see the signs of a multiple personality, she was reluctant to admit it to herself and her colleagues. There are still many professionals who don't believe there is such a thing as a multiple personality. VanderVennen, who has just returned from a conference on multiple personalities in Chicago, says more cases of the disorder are surfacing. 'There were 450 professionals at this conference, and it was the first ever on the topic,' VanderVennen says. 'It's surprising how widespread the disorder is becoming.'"

This report appeared only 11 years ago. The woman that Mary counselled is now completely well. And Mary has seen several other clients like her. Today many books on multiple personalities have been written.

Mary's preparation

"What is God saying to our larger society?" Mary wonders, as she reflects on the emergence of abuse situations. "Maybe it's evidence of God's grace." But she quickly adds, "It doesn't feel like grace." She wonders about the timing.

She herself was prepared for this outbreak of abuse revelations, having worked with veterans in Chicago who were suffering from traumatic stress disorders. When she came to Toronto, a few clients came to her with stress disorders related to World War II and concentration camps. Then she started dealing with sexual abuse outside the church. After that, sexual abuse inside the church. Later on, cases of sadistic abuse emerged, abuse that had a ritualistic and deliberate quality.

In more recent years, Mary has even had to respond to the presence of evil spirits. One evil spirit addressed her through a client and told her that she could not have that person, upon which Mary claimed that person for Jesus. Experiences like these have shown Mary the importance of prayer and the need to integrate spiritual and emotional health.

Disappointed in the church

Mary has also felt an increasing sadness over the years about the prevalence of abuse in the church. She has been deeply disappointed that people she respected have abused children, even their own children.

But she is particularly frustrated by what she feels is the presence of an evil spirit in the church that keeps leaders from seeing the seriousness of abuse and allowing them to protect perpetrators. She thinks of the opposition that abuse committees of which she has been a part have had to endure.

She blames this opposition on the system of patriarchy in the church. In fact, she links three issues in the Christian Reformed Church, of which she's been a life-long member, to the stubborn persistence of the patriarchical mindset: forbidding children at the Lord's Supper, refusing to ordain women and minimizing the prevalence of abuse. It goes back to the Garden of Eden, she says, and the fact that people prefer to live out of the curse.

"I'm not saying that everyone who's opposed to women in office is evil," she adds. "But these people do uphold the systemic oppression of women and children."

She loves her church

What has become a healing revelation to Mary is the fact that Jesus is God incarnate. "The most profound way the Lord could overturn the curse and to overthrow all the taboos was to be born of a virgin, without the help of a male," she says. The Incarnation has become as central to Mary as the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Mary has had to take steps for her own spiritual health as she dealt with extremely difficult and wearisome cases. She has been seeing a spiritual director for several years, a Roman Catholic sister who gave her spiritual comfort and direction. Mary recalls that service, for which she paid $25 a visit, as being very meaningful. The director is extremely gentle and personal, she says. Mary wishes that the Christian Reformed Church would offer such services.

Not that she is ungrateful about what the Christian Reformed Church has to offer. She is thankful for the intellectual heritage that she can find in her denomination. The reformational idea of different life spheres and a recognition that life is complex reverberate in her. She only wishes those things could be combined with a healthy mysticism.

It's because she loves the church so much (her dad was a CRC pastor) that she finds its shortcomings so painful. "If I didn't care about the CRC, it wouldn't hurt so much," she says.

Over the years, Mary has come to see healing in a much more profound way. "God is always in the business of healing," she says; "not necessarily in the business of curing." But healing takes time, and the timing is entirely in God's hand, she believes. Sometimes there's healing after a divorce; sometimes it takes a generation or two. Knowing that God is working things out in his good time makes her a lot more relaxed than she used to be. She agrees with T.S. Eliot that time, by itself, is no healer; but healing does take time.

Now that she's retiring she has a lot more questions than she has answers. "Human beings are incredibly complex," she says.

Letting go

What will retirement bring to this highly committed and capable therapist/musician/teacher/thinker/grandmother?

"I'm not taking up any commitments for now," says Mary. "I'll let everything go and see what emerges. I can imagine spending more time on music. I enjoy writing and I think I have some things to say."

Perhaps retirement will include a few more international stints like the one that took her and Robert to China in 1993, where they taught English; or their trip to Uganda in 1994, where Mary gave a course in counselling to Ugandan hospital personnel.

But first of all, she wants to experience what it is like not to have any big commitments and responsibilities. One gets the impression that whatever she will take up will have to fit into the category of doing it for the sheer pleasure of it.

For the enjoyment of it

Mary learned that lesson from her experience with music. Although she has been an accomplished pianist and organist for most of her life (she studied piano from age four), she always found it difficult to integrate her music into the rest of her life. She had periods when she really enjoyed playing, but then, inevitably, came the times that she would lose interest.

Mary felt pressure from others who would remind her that God had given her a great gift and that she was obliged to use it for the Lord. "I did not know what that meant," says Mary.

Then, one day, she heard a radio interview with the well-known soprano Janet Baker. Baker loved to sing, but she was held back from performing by stage fright. Baker solved this problem by learning to sing for her own pleasure. Why does God give a gift to someone? Baker had asked. For the same reason that anyone gives a gift to someone: so that person will enjoy it. "You don't owe anybody anything," Baker had said. "Develop your gift for the sheer pleasure of doing it."

"I needed to hear that," says Mary. And somehow you know that this will be an important theme for whatever she ends up doing in her retirement. Turning 65 gives a person permission for that kind of freedom.

COURTESY MARY VANDERVENNEN

At her retirement party Mary served cake and laughter

Mary's rite of passage

Bert Witvoet

TORONTO, Ont. — About 100 friends, colleagues and clients gathered in Bloor Street United Church on November 10 to honor Mary VanderVennen before she retires at the end of this year.

Colleagues spoke of her honesty, her wisdom, her integrity and her sense of humor. Clients talked of her as a person who had brought healing and had shown them the face of God. Her husband, Robert, gave a biographical account of Mary, and her son Mark spoke lovingly and admiringly of a mother who had come to terms with her own past and had been an inspiration to him.

Mary herself rounded off the evening with a short speech and a piano recital.

For her piano piece she had chosen *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother* by Johann Sebastian Bach. It was a piece she had played as a young student and now played as a retiring therapist.

It was while she underwent a difficult termination of relationship with a client that she remembered Bach's *Capriccio*. In an article entitled "Notes on Termination", published in a 1970 edition of *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, Mary writes: "I had learned it as a piano student some years before and had played it frequently since then, enjoying the composition simply as delightful music. I went back to it and discovered that the youthful composer had felt all the emotions I was feeling and, more than that, had worked through them to a resolution."

Towards the end of this article in which Mary explains the six movements of this Bach composition, she adds: "Thus in returning to the *Capriccio*, I began at last to understand something of what I had experienced ..., namely that the termination process is not something one can be helped with very much. Instead it is, in essence, at the deepest level a solitary experience which challenges one's inner resources. It is an experience to be resolved ultimately on the basis of one's orientation to life."

And so, in spite of the encouragement and love expressed by so many of her friends at her retirement party, even as they blessed her with arms raised, the termination of her working career, too, will be a solitary experience for Mary VanderVennen, one that will challenge her inner resources.

God weaves together the strands of our and his activity

Mary VanderVennen

Healing is not an easy road to take. The Christian poet T.S. Eliot once wrote:

And the way up is the way down
And the way forward is the way back.
You cannot face it steadily,
But this thing is sure:
Time is no healer.

Eliot is right: time is no healer, But healing often takes time. According to Eliot, if you want to go up, you first have to go down; and if you want to go forward, you first have to go back. It's that way in emotional healing too. You have to go down and back before you can go up and forward.

Sometimes healing happens after a divorce. Sometimes healing occurs around a deathbed as we say goodbye. Sometimes healing is seen only in the next generation.

If time would heal, we would not have to do anything but wait for time to pass. But we are called by Jesus Christ to redeem the time. In other words, God does not relieve us of the responsibility or the consequences of our collective brokenness. But as I look back over my years of doing therapy and over my life, I am profoundly convinced that God's ultimate purpose in our lives is healing.

COURTESY MARY VANDERVENNEN

Judy Cook of Salem chats with Mary

I'm grateful to the people who have written me as they heard of my retirement to tell me what has happened in their lives since they left therapy. The theme as I hear it is that the struggles are not over, but now there is freedom and joy in their lives as they continue their journey. My faith has been strengthened by their stories.

We can celebrate the fact that God has been there all along, weaving together the strands of our human activity and of his activity, which may include many people and span many generations. And we can look forward confidently to that time when all healing will be complete.

Feature

To be a writer, you must rewrite

Lini Richarda Grol

At one of our writers' meetings, our speaker gave us the in and outs about getting published. As proof of her success she showed us her published books. We were impressed, for few of us had a book in our name, though many of us had contributed to periodicals.

At the question period one of us asked timidly, "Did you do a lot of rewriting before your book was accepted?"

Our speaker seemed amused. "I never rewrite. It kills the spontaneity of your story," she asserted brazenly.

Another person piped up: "Don't you have to rewrite if an editor asks you to?"

Adamantly the woman stated, "No! Either they like your story, or they don't. Rewriting doesn't make it any better. Simply take it back and send it somewhere else."

Baffled, we looked at one another — as if editors were anxiously waiting for our masterpieces.

Rejection slips pile up

I remembered one of my stories that had made the rounds to seemingly every publisher in Canada. How my heart sank every time I saw my large manilla envelope come back to me with a mass-produced rejection slip.

But one day my spirits rose when I saw, stapled to my story, a short letter addressed to me and signed by the editor. I rose to cloud nine when I read, "Your story is a gem, but it needs a little polishing to make it sparkle. Rewrite it and send it back to me. I think it will make a pretty good children's book."

Wow! I already pictured the book in our local bookstore with my name on its cover.

I ran to my typewriter, eager to do the final rewrite on my soon-to-be-published book. But when I scanned the pages I crashed from cloud nine. In disbelief I turned the pages, which had been darkened by the editor's blue marks.

What did she mean with her praise? How could this woman say my story was good when there was so much wrong with it? Was she poking fun at me?

A few periodicals had published my stories without correction. I was furious at my naivety in believing her praise, and in thinking I had found a publisher for my masterpiece. My "gem of a story" with the editor's letter landed hard in the waste basket. There!

It was obvious my writing was no good. I was beaten. Grimly I covered my typewriter. That was it. I would give up.

Polishing the 'gem'

In a hurry, I left the house and roamed around all afternoon. I even considered selling my typewriter in lieu of a too-expensive new dress.

After all, no more writing meant fewer expenses in postage, typewriter ribbons and stationery, and it would leave me more time and money for lighthearted fun.

During the night that word "gem" haunted me. What if she was right that my story indeed was a gem?

I retrieved story and letter from the wastebasket to reread both. I relished the editor's phrases: "A gem that needs some polishing," and "a pretty good children's book." Maybe she meant it.

Scrutinizing my story I realized that this editor had spent a lot of time on my work; therefore, she must have seen something in it. Why else would she have given it so much of her attention and time? I had to admit that she had made some pretty good points.

Indeed, I could do better, and I would show her. That very night, guided by her blue marks, I rewrote my story. Then, confident that this time my story was truly a sparkling gem, I mailed it, with my thank you letter for her advice.

Editor doesn't give up either

Within four days my story was back. This time the editor signed her letter Sharon. She wrote: "Your story sparkles in some places ... but it still needs work. One more rewrite. Keep up the good work."

Her letter filled me with joy, but I seethed when I saw how her blue pencil had ravaged my so-called sparkling story. She had obliterated whatever sparkle there had been.

Again my blue-faced manuscript crash-landed in the waste basket. Yet after a while I retrieved the manuscript again, read it and realized all the work Sharon had done on my story. Humbly, I went back to my old typewriter. (This was before I had a word processor and I never had been a good typist.)

Six times my story bounced back at me, for Sharon would not give up either. She patiently kept on praising me, while at the same time blue-pencilling my precious story to the hilt.

What a day it was when, that seventh time, I received a contract with the promise of an advance. Shall I ever forget that glorious day when, thanks to Sharon's patience, I finally held my book in my hands? And my joy was even greater when later, mothers told me that they often read my story to their children.

Would I ever again rewrite a story if an editor were to ask me?

You bet I would!

Lini Grol is a scizzor-cut artist and freelance writer who lives in Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ont.

A free hand scissors cutting by Lini Grol

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Greece's Free Evangelicals:

Living against the grain

Part One

During the months of June and July, David Koyzis and his fiance, Dr. Nancy Calvert, traveled with another couple and their children, and a group of 44 Wheaton College students to the eastern Mediterranean region. Their journey began in Greece and took them to Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and finally to Rome, where the tour ended.

Following the completion of the formal part of the tour, Koyzis and Calvert spent two weeks on the island of Cyprus, where David's father was born. In this first of four articles, Koyzis recounts his impressions of a community of evangelical Christians in Greece.

Koyzis and Calvert on the Acropolis, Athens.

David T. Koyzis

Our tour of the eastern Mediterranean began in Greece, where we stayed at the Hellenic Scripture Union, located in two adjacent villas in the pleasant Athenian garden suburb of Kifisia. Our hosts were Dr. Miltos and Polly Angelatos, lay leaders in the Fellowship of Free Evangelical Churches of Greece, a group similar to the Plymouth Brethren here in North America.

Like the latter, the Free Evangelicals have no ordained clergy, follow no set liturgies, observe believer's baptism, and celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. Their hymns are largely revival songs imported from North America and translated into Greek. Wheaton College (perhaps the best-known evangelical university in the U.S.) has long enjoyed a close relationship with this group of Christians, and it even conferred an honorary doctorate on Miltos Angelatos in 1990.

The Free Evangelicals are not to be confused with the Greek Evangelical Church, an historic Reformed denomination with roots similar to that of the Christian Reformed Church. By Angelatos' account, Greek Evangelicals and Free Evangelicals are not always on the best of terms, and efforts to gain some degree of co-operation, even on so practical an enterprise as a home for the aged, have not borne fruit.

Bearing the brunt of official policy

Both groups of evangelicals are a distinct minority in the largely Orthodox Greek culture in which they live. Evangelicals have often borne the brunt of official government policies favoring the Orthodox Church. In fact, in one celebrated case several years ago, evangelist Costas Makris spent time in jail for violating an archaic law against proselytism. Consequently, the Free Evangelicals nearly always speak negatively of their Orthodox neighbors, whose claims to genuine Christianity they openly doubt.

Our group from Wheaton did not have the opportunity to worship at either a Greek Evangelical or Free Evangelical church. However, on our first evening in Athens we were treated to a musical program put on by members of Angelatos' own Free Evangelical congregation.

Two things struck me about this evening. First, it started on time, which is unusual among Greeks, for whom punctuality is not a principal virtue. Second, their musical offerings bore little evidence of traditional Greek Orthodox liturgical influence. Much of their music was quite Western-sounding, while a few of the hymns — written by a member of the congregation — were reminiscent of the popular music of Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, known for his legendary film score for *Zorba the Greek*.

During our last full day in Greece we were privileged to have lunch with Dr. and Mrs. Angelatos, and our conversation turned to politics. If they and their fellow Free Evangelicals see themselves in an adversarial relationship with the surrounding Orthodox culture, they are at one with their fellow Greeks on foreign policy issues, especially those of Athens towards Macedonia and Serbia.

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, its southern former republic of Macedonia has been on Greece's blacklist. Because the predominantly Slavic republic has adopted the symbols of Alexander the Great's Macedonia, and because Greeks claim Alexander as one of their own heroes, Athens has refused to recognize the new republic until and unless it changes its name and symbols.

Arcane or life-and-death?

Though it seems a rather arcane dispute to Greece's fellow European Union members, it is a life and death issue to most Greeks. Indeed, Dr. and Mrs. Angelatos agree with their government's stand. Macedonia is Greek, they say, as three millennia of archaeological evidence clearly indicate.

As for the Serbs, our hosts argued that NATO is wrong to portray them as the villains in the current Balkan war. The Serbs are not the aggressors; they are simply trying to defend themselves against the Muslims, who are attempting to take their land away.

What do the Greeks fear most? They fear that the two great powers of the day, namely, the United States and Germany (yes, Germany!) will permit Turkey to gain a foothold in those parts of the Balkans inhabited by "Turks," including Bosnia-Hercegovina. To Greeks and Serbs alike, the Bosnian Muslims are "Turks" who happen to speak a Slavic language.

Our table conversation made me aware of the extent to which the attitudes of even Christians are shaped by the countries and cultures of which they are a part. The Free Evangelicals of Greece obviously live in tension with the surrounding culture. Accordingly, they have come to find their place in the world by defining themselves in opposition to Greek Orthodoxy. In so doing, they have adopted much of the external culture of North American evangelicalism. Yet they remain Greeks to the core, and when they view the larger world, particularly the conflict several hundred miles to their north, they do so as Greeks.

What would they say of the televised footage we saw in July of Bosnian Muslim refugees streaming out of the captured city of Srebrenica? Media coverage of this served to soften western public opinion for NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs two months later. Yet the Greek media undoubtedly show a different side of the war — one with which we may be less familiar.

Sitting so close to the civilizational divide between Christianity and Islam, Greeks and Serbs alike are less likely than we are to value abstract notions of justice and the virtues of pluralism. Memories are long in that part of the world, and battles fought centuries ago continue to live in people's minds and to fuel their apprehensions. The irony for the Free Evangelicals is that their fears are directed towards both Greeks and Turks, thereby putting them in a rather uncomfortable position.

PHOTOS COURTESY DAVID KOYZIS

Dr. Miltos and Polly Angelatos

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont.

Education

U.S. school voucher plan re-ignites church/state debate

John E. Stumbo

In the U.S., debates over educational policies are re-igniting old church/state discussions in a land whose Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion but forbids state establishment of any religion (1st Amendment). Congress is considering a bill for an experimental school voucher program to allow low-income families to choose schools other than the state's public schools.

Under the proposed pilot plan, between 10 and 20 school systems would be given federal money to provide school expense vouchers to qualifying low-income parents. The parents could then use the vouchers to pay for tuition, fees and transportation costs for schools of their choice. The bill stipulates that "any public or private school, including a private sectarian school," may be an alternative.

Public schools flawed

"It is clear that the public schools are not working for all students, particularly in our poorest communities," stated one of the bill's sponsors, Senator Joe Lieberman, in comments published in the *Congressional Record*. "Private school choice opens doors for children [to] religious schools which often have had better results than public schools."

Lieberman, a Democrat from Connecticut, added that "the success of parochial schools is ... due to their students and teachers' shared beliefs and strong moral values."

The proposal is not original with this bill, but has long been controversial. Advocates of a strict separation of church and state argue that federally funded vouchers used to support a religious institution would constitute a violation of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.

However, a similar policy already in effect has not been ruled unconstitutional. Under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, government funds are given to parents of qualifying children through vouchers. Parents can use the vouchers to purchase child care services from an array of providers, including religious child care facilities.

The proposed plan to extend a voucher program to schools demonstrates some senators' dismay about the failure of public education in the U.S. to teach values. A voucher would allow parents to exercise their religious beliefs by choosing schools that would teach religious values to their children.

In an article titled "America's Youth: A Crisis of Character," Senator Dan Coats, another co-sponsor of the bill and a Republican from Indiana, asserted that values-based education is essential for the U.S.'s future. "This crisis of values is not a marginal issue pursued by moralists and leftover Puritans," he stated. "It is central to the health and future of economic and social institutions."

Albertans can now 'surf the Net' for education information

EDMONTON (AE) — Alberta's 541,000 students, 31,000 teachers, parents and taxpayers now have a new high-tech way to learn about the province's (public) education system. "Education in Alberta" is on the Internet at: http://-ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca.

This new "home page" includes sections on students and learning, teaching, parents and education, funding, technology and news.

"One of the most useful features of this home page is its direct links to information put online by our education partners," says Education Minister Halvar Jonson. There are connections to school boards, individual schools, provincial and national education groups.

"While a group of high school students in Lethbridge check out the Alberta Teachers' Association study tips, a family in Red Deer might be browsing through the Eastview Community School site," said Jonson "While a Grade 3 teacher in Fort McMurray looks for information about authorized math teaching resources, a new trustee in Calgary may be reviewing the funding framework."

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'Just Dewey it!'

EDUCATION

Alyce Oosterhuis

As we were preparing to leave the college on a late Friday afternoon I asked a colleague for a title for my next column. He said, "Why don't you use the slogan that was suggested for the B.Ed. Class of '95 T-shirt: "Just Dewey It"? We laughed and went home.

However, thinking about that slogan, I am struck by the changes that have occurred in 30 years of teacher education. When I attended Calvin College in the '60s, John Dewey was *persona non grata*. His views of a need for practical, progressive, experiential, child-centred educational programs were decried as anti-authority, anti-tradition and atheistic.

Dewey not on the reading list

We did not read John Dewey: our educational literature list consisted of Van Til, Kuyper, Waterink, Jaarsma, Beversluis, Bavinck, Van Bruggen and later, Wolterstorff. We graduated with a strong sense of mission to a Christian education that would be characterized as academically excellent, reformationally faithful and culturally critical.

However, since the schools in which we taught were more frequently ethnically and creedally homogeneous "islands" than culturally engaging reformational beacons, we tended to emphasize academic excellence and "basics" rather than cultural transformations.

That emphasis paid off. Our graduates entered post-secondary schools with self-confidence and an eagerness to test the waters beyond the island contours. Truth was no longer seen to be limited to our Reformed "giants"; God's common grace permeates this world and kernels of truth may reside in the most secular of his "saints." To be culturally critical one must be involved, relevant and on the cutting edge of change. We must read and wrestle with the Deweys, Freires, Hirsts and Postmans of this century in devoloping a world vision that will make our schools into a "leavening force"for the next century.

Where's the clarion call?

Yet as I think of "Just Dewey It," I do not hear a clarion call for change and worldview-defining. "Just Dewey It" is a play on the Nike T-shirt slogan "Just Do It," which is more a call for unreflective action and consumptive spontaneity than reflective change. For some hearers it may even have some sexual overtones.

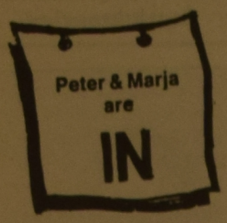
Does the slogan confirm that our vision of being "transformers" now needs to be revised to see ourselves as having been "transformed"? Are we inevitably tainted by that with which we associate? Do we have to return to our isolated islands to keep a sense of mission? Our Christian educators speak of "building consistently on foundations" and of educating for "responsive discipleship" — concepts that encourage us to hold on to each other as we sometimes find ourselves adrift in a sea of change.

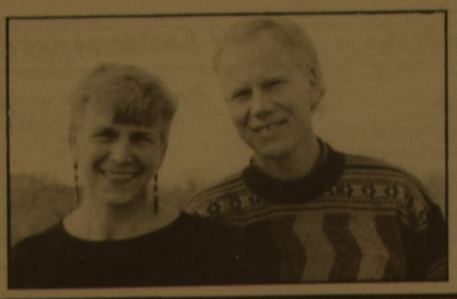
But maybe I am reading too much into one student's attempt at humor. "Just Dewey It" is actually a very clever play on words to identify its wearer as an education student who knows how to relax and laugh. And we all know that with the increasing stress levels among today's youth, a good laugh is better than an uptight lecture on educational foundations from Oosterhuis. Besides, can you imagine people's reactions if B.Ed. students wore the slogan: "Just Kuyper It" or "Clear the Water Rink!" or "Hullow Bruims" or "Do!, ye wierds!" or "Oyster Beds"?

Chances are that the wearer of these slogans would have to do a lot of explaining. On the other hand, that explanation could also be an opportunity for discipleship. There I go again — being too serious.

Alyce Horzelenberg Oosterhuis has been working with Hull and Bruinsma in the B.Ed. program this year at The King's University College, Edmonton.

Advice



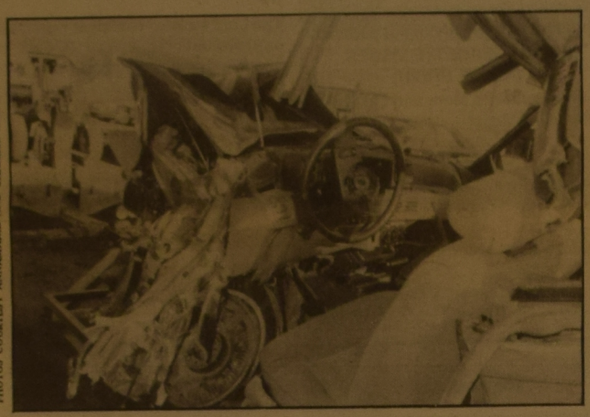


After car accident, 'precious, perfect baby' was born

Dear Readers:

This past spring we published a letter from a young woman who was pregnant with her first child when she was involved in a terrible car accident. As she recovered from two broken legs, a broken foot and a broken jaw, brutally insensitive persons made comments like these: "When is the abortion scheduled?" And even, "Do they know how deformed the baby will be?"

The writer struggled with her inability to confront these people. She also felt that if something did turn out to be wrong with the baby it would be her fault because of the accident.



PHOTOS COURTESY ANNAMARIE AND CHARLES BILMER

The Bilmer's car after the crash. The roof had to be cut open with the "jaws of life" to rescue Annamarie Bilmer.

Finally, she also wondered how she could ever repay her family for their support through all these times.

In our response, we first expressed our shock at these hurtful comments. Then we encouraged her to believe that Jesus' words were also meant for her when he said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."

Lastly, we reminded her that relationships are not about "checks and balances" which require that we "owe" people debts and favors. We invited her to simply receive her family's unconditional love during this traumatic time. "Our relationships are to be characterized by God's grace," we wrote. "Let that grace also be the basis for forgiving yourself for any self-blame you carry about the circumstances surrounding the accident."

The accident happened on Dec. 17, 1994. Our column was published on April 21, 1995. Two days after the baby was born this young mother wrote us the following letter:

Dear P & M:

I really appreciated the wonderful column about trust, faith and God's graciousness. It helped us deal with everything.

My husband and I have had our baby. A precious, perfect baby girl! God has given us the biggest miracle of our lives to show us his power and his love. Her name is Danielle Justine Bilmer, born two weeks early on Aug. 17.

God gave me the strength to handle all of the trials. My biggest gift from him is my husband, Charlie, the strong one who kept me strong; my second biggest gift is our child! We opted to go without the special testing that would tell us if something was wrong with the baby, because it didn't matter.

After extensive physiotherapy I can now walk without crutches or canes and I can carry our baby myself. She will be baptized on Sept. 3. Then we can give God back the promise and the child he has lent us.

Dear Readers:

What a thrill to receive this letter from Annamarie and Charles Bilmer, from Long Sault, Ontario. We asked their permission to identify them; we also invited Annamarie to send us some pictures to share with you. When she mailed us the requested photos she wrote that Danielle, at eight weeks, had already grown so much. She also told us that she is facing surgery on her jaw and that it will be years before things are back to normal.

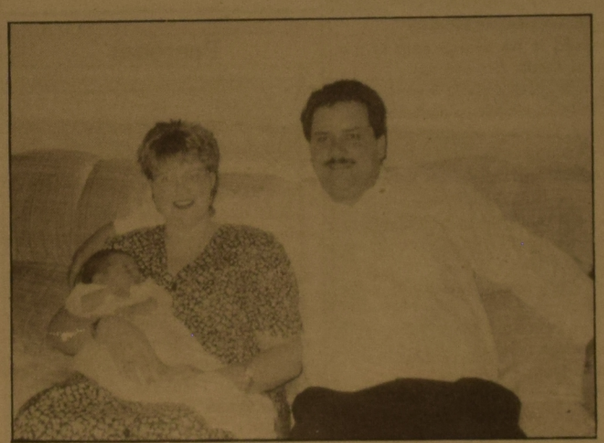
But she again expressed her thanks to the Lord and to her husband for being her strong arm. She signed off with these words: "I hope I can help even one person who thinks that things will never get better and that there is no bright future for them."

We ended our original column with a reference to Psalm 126. As you read this young family's story and look at the accompanying photographs, consider its' relevance: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:5).

Annamarie and Charlie, we praise the Lord with you for Danielle, and for God's healing and protective presence in your lives. Your testimony moves and encourages us all in the face of our own difficulties.

Write to: Peter and Marja Slofstra, 16 Kimbermount Drive, St. Catharines, ON, L2N 5V6

Peter and Marja Slofstra are a pastor and wife team living in St. Catharines, Ont. Thery are assisted by an advisory panel consisting of Herman de Jong, Bill Lidkea, Alan Vander Maas, Marian Van Til and Bert Witvoet.



Annamarie and Charles Bilmer with Danielle

U.S. Senate considers religious freedom amendment

WASHINGTON, D.C. (EP) — The merits of a constitutional amendment to secure rights to religious expression were debated at a U.S. Senate hearing last month. Supporters of the amendment say it will check the Supreme Court's tendency to be too restrictive on questions such as the religious rights of public school students.

"Religious Americans today find that equal treatment by government is often only a promise, not a reality," Steven McFarland of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom said in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

McFarland said that judges and school officials frequently forbid student Bible clubs from holding meetings at public schools, even though Congress passed and the Supreme Court upheld a bill permitting exactly that. The solution, he said, is a constitutional amendment to secure rights to religious expression.

Is it necessary?

"We need to amend the Constitution — nothing less," said McFarland. "The problem is constitutional misinterpretation and that can only be solved constitutionally."

Strict church-state separationists opposed such an amendment. "Religious speech is fully protected by current law, and no amendment could do anything but mischief," University of Texas Law Professor Douglas Laycock told the committee. Oliver Thomas of the National Council of the Churches added, "Before we adopt a new constitutional amendment on religion, let's try using the one we have."

The proposed amendment, which has the backing of the National Association of Evangelicals, states: "Neither the United States nor any state shall deny benefits to or otherwise discriminate against any persons, acting in a private capacity, on account of their religious expression, belief, or identity; and the exercise by such persons of freedom of religion, speech, press or association shall not be construed as an establishment of religion."

Classifieds

Classified Rates

(Revised February 1, 1995)

Births	$25.00
Marriages & Engagements	$40.00
Anniversaries	$45.00
2-column anniversaries	$90.00
Obituaries	$45.00
Notes of thanks	$35.00
Birthdays	$40.00

All other one-column classified advertisements: $15.00 per column inch. NOTE: Minimum fee is $15.00. Letter under file number $35.00 extra. Photos: $25.00 additional charge.

Note: All rates shown above are GST inclusive

ATTENTION!

a) *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format.,

b) A sheet with information about an obituary sent by funeral homes is *not* acceptable since it leads to errors and confusion.

c) Photographs sent by fax *are not* acceptable. If you wish a photo included, send us the original.

d) *Christian Courier* will not be responsible for any errors due to handwritten or phoned-in advertisements.

e) The rate shown above for classifieds covers any length up to five column inches. *Christian Courier* reserves the right to charge for additional column inches at the rate of $15.00 per column inch (GST incl.).

NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS

We offer a one-year subscription for only $25.00 (GST incl.) to the couples whose wedding is announced in the *Christian Courier* and to the parents of the child whose birth announcement appears in our paper. To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request the wedding or birth announcement to enclose $25.00 and the couple's correct address.

Christian Courier
4-261 Martindale Rd.,
St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1
Phone: (905) 682-8311
Fax: (905) 682-8313

Thank You

HEIDINGA:

Marten & Wieke (Vicky) Heidinga-Stienstra like to thank everybody for the overwhelming response to our 50th wedding anniversary.

It made us humble. Above all we thank our Heavenly Father, who through all those years was and is our personal Friend and Saviour.

We hope to move to Holland Chr. Homes in Brampton, Ont. in the beginning of next year and we wish you all a blessed Christmas and New Year.

Thank You

GEUZEBROEK:

Mrs. M.Geuzebroek and family wish to sincerely thank everyone that so kindly supported us with expressions of sympathy, support, and prayers, following the passing away of our husband, father and grandfather.

WASSENAAR:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the many letters and cards I received after Andy passed away. It is comforting to know that we were in the thoughts and prayers of so many people. Thank you for your words of comfort and love.

Sincerely,
Emmy Wassenaar & family.

Anniversaries

Smithers, B.C. Lindsay, Ont.
1960 1995

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh.24:15b).

With thankfulness to God we joyfully announce the 35th wedding anniversary on December 14, 1995, of our parents and grandparents:

MIKE and JENNY BANDSTRA
(nee BEERDA)

May God bless you and keep you in His care.

Congratulations and love from all of us!

Bryant & Dawn Bandstra — Surrey, B.C.
Matthew, Amanda, Stephanie, Tiffany
Bruce Bandstra — Sioux Falls, South Dak.
Nathan, Brandon, Justin
David Bandstra — Lindsay, Ont.
Greg & Anita Hamden — Omemee, Ont.
Kevin, Scott

Home address: 242 Angeline St.S., R.R.#2, Lindsay, ON K9V 4R2

50th ANNIVERSARY
November 22, 1995

"Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob" (Ps.146:5a).

It is with great joy and thanksgiving to God that we like to announce the 50-year marriage of our parents and our Opa and Oma

WILLEM and DERSKEN JANSEN
(nee WOLSINK)

We pray that God may continue to bless and guide their lives in the years to come.

Love and congratulations, your children:
Henry & Lynda Jansen
John & Nell Jansen
Willie & Marg Jansen
Jackie & Mike Doyle
and 8 grandchildren.

Home address: 7900 McLaughlin Rd.S., Cov.T.PH03, Brampton, ON L6V 3N2

Anniversaries

1965 December 3 1995

It is with joy and thanksgiving that we celebrate the 30th anniversary of our parents

FRED and AUDREY
VANDER VELDE (HARINGA)

Congratulations from all your children:
Ed & Pauline Vander Velde
Lucinda & Doug Sluys
Doug & Tina Vander Velde
Anna & Paul Vos

Thank you for a wonderful Christian home filled with love and support.

Home address: 2621 Cavendish Dr., Burlington, ON L7P 3W6

Imlay City, Mich. Burlington, Ont.
1955 December 16 1995

"For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end." (Ps.48:14).

With great joy and thankfulness to God we celebrate, D.V., the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents

JOHN and JENNIE VERHOEVEN
(nee STRYKER)

Congratulations Dad and Mom, Opa and Oma! We love you.

Bernie — Hamilton
Peter, Stephanie, Matthew
Julia — Burlington
Lydia & Rick— Burlington
Jesse, Ryan, Aaron
Annette — Burlington
Brett, Amy

Open house will be held on Saturday, December 16, 1995, from 1-4 p.m. at Faith Chr. Reformed Church, 2265 Mountainside Drive, Burlington, Ont.

Best wishes only.

Home address: 1220 Stanley Drive, Burlington, ON L7P 2K8

Personal

Happy Christian lady, widow, almost mid sixties, living in B.C., Dutch and CRC background, but **not** a denominationalist, Christian first, would like to share my life with someone who has been praying for a partner in the Lord, as I have. According to the Word, it is "Pray and Work," that's why this advertisement in this Christian paper, from my side. Your letter in response would be your side of the "work" after prayer! Please send your reply to File #2636, c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St.Catharines, ON L2W 1A1.

Anniversaries

Congratulations to Sid and Jeanette Visser on the occasion of their 35th Wedding Anniversary!

1960 December 24 1995

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory." (Rom.11:36 NIV)

We would like to announce the 35th wedding anniversary of our parents:

SID and JEANETTE VISSER
(nee DE BRUIN)

Congratulations Mom and Dad!

Jerry & Ali Visser — Rocky Mountain House, Alta.
Aaron, Janalee, Karissa, Bradly
Angela & Neil Gable (nee Visser) — Grand Prairie, Alta.
Lan and Evan
Thomas & Patricia Visser — Caroline, Alta.
Mellissa, Cameron, Breanne

Personal

Retired gentleman, widower, early 70s, Protestant, **likes to meet Christian lady** between 65-70 years old. Perhaps we could start a friendly lasting relationship. Location southern Ontario. **Please write to File #2635, c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1.**

Christian Reformed widow looking for an independent, physically attractive, Christian man, age 70-75, for friendship or correspondence, within the Huron/Perth area. Please respond to: **File #2634, c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1**

ONE TO ANOTHER

Christian companion magazine. Hundreds of readers Canada-wide. Single issue $5.

Write to:
#302, 1502-2nd Ave. S.
Lethbridge, AB T1J 4A2

Anniversaries

Obituaries

The Lord took to Himself at His time, on November 16, 1995,

TEYE R. TEITSMA

in his 84th year.

Loving husband of Ada (Atie).

Dear father of:
Al Teitsma — Chicago, Ill.
Henny & John VanderKolk — Winona
Liz & Jake VanderSchee — Liverpool, England
John & Renee Teitsma — Grimsby
Dick & Michelle Teitsma — Hamilton

Proud grandfather of 12 grandchildren.

Dear brother of Annie Colyn, St.Catharines and Lies Faas, Pier Teitsma, Mep v.d.Flier and Elly Teitsma of the Netherlands.

The funeral service was held on Nov.18, 1995, in the Mountainview Chr.Ref.Church, Grimsby, Ont., Pastor J.W. VanWeelden officiating.

"The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation." (Ps.118:14).

On November 10, 1995, after weeks of suffering, the Lord took home our friend and member

ENGBERT TENIJENHUIS

at the age of 81.

May our Heavenly Father comfort his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Eventide — the Seniors' Bible discussion group of the Chr.Ref. Church in Kentville, Nova Scotia.

The Living Word
Sermons for reading services.
Contact:
R. Vander Ploeg Secr./Treas.
210 Clarke St. N.
Woodstock, ON N4S 7M7
Phone: (519) 539-2117

Classifieds

Job opportunities

Wanted: A motivated individual required for a profitable home-base service in the **Kent/Essex/Lambton** area. Minimum investment approx. $4,500.
For more info. contact **Dick at 1-800-351-6160 or Fax (519) 354-7670. Fibrenew Industries.**

Auto Repair Technician needed for a busy four-bay garage in the **Hamilton, Ont.** area. Preferably eight years minimum experience required. Must know A.C.work, fuel injection and related diagnostics. Propane experience an asset but is not necessary. Good wages with benefits in place. Pleasant working environment. Please send resume and references to: **RYCKMAN'S AUTO SERVICE & SALES Ltd., att. Jack L.Dam, 2350 Hwy #6, Mount Hope, ON L0R 1W0.**

CAMPUS CHAPLAIN:
The Brock University Christian Reformed Chaplaincy Committee seeks applications for a possible position as **campus chaplain** commencing in the summer of 1996. We are seeking an ordained person but will consider an unordained person with an appropriate masters degree or higher. The successful candidate will be self-motivated, disciplined, possess good organizational and counselling skills, and be able to relate his or her Christian beliefs in an academic environment and in conformity with Brock's policy on campus ministries. If you are interested in this challenging position located in **St.Catharines, Ontario**, please send your resume and a short statement of your vision for campus ministry by **January 1, 1996**, to:
John Teeuwsen, Secretary, Campus Ministry Committee of Classis Niagara, CRCNA, 2 Eden Drive, St.Catharines, ON L2R 6B2, phone: (905) 682-9127 evenings.

Herdsman/manager wanted. 44 tie stall barn. Some field work necessary.
Call (613) 398-6956

For Rent

Apartment for rent. Private; over separate garage in park-like setting. **Jordan, Ont.**, area. Kitchen with appliances, living room, one bedroom, 3-piece bath. Available Dec. 1, 1995. **Phone (905) 562-7464 or (905) 562-5232.**

For rent: Three-bedroom cottage in scenic **Holten, the Netherlands.** Phone Andy Borger: **(905) 623-6049.**

Job Opportunities

REDEEMER COLLEGE

Applications are invited for a tenure-track position in:

ENGLISH

to teach a variety of undergraduate courses in English language, literature and criticism, including 18th and 19th century British literature.

Candidates should be committed to teaching and pursuing scholarship from a Reformed Christian perspective, and should possess a doctoral degree.

The position begins Aug. 1, 1996 (pending budgetary approval). Deadline: Jan. 31, 1996 or until filled.

Direct inquiries and applications to:

Dr. M. Elaine Botha, Vice-President (Academic)
Redeemer College, 777 Highway 53 E.
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4

Redeemer College offers equal employment opportunities to qualified applicants. In accordance with Canadian Immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

REDEEMER COLLEGE IS ONTARIO'S ONLY UNIVERSITY-LEVEL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Job Opportunities

REDEEMER COLLEGE

Applications are being accepted for the position of

PUBLICATIONS OFFICER

The candidate will be qualified in the areas of layout, graphic design, photography, journalism, and other aspects of desktop publishing.

Please submit a letter of application and resume to:

The Human Resources Director
Redeemer College
777 Highway 53 E.
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4

REDEEMER COLLEGE IS ONTARIO'S ONLY UNIVERSITY-LEVEL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Job Opportunities

Toronto District Christian High School
Woodbridge, Ontario

invites applications for a
Director of Development/Financial Services
Responsible for
Public Relations, Financial Management,
and assist with Fund Raising

The successful applicant must be:
* a self-motivated individual with an outgoing personality and ability to promote Christian education
* able to establish effective communication with the TDCH constituency
* able to initiate and implement plans to manage the school's budget
* able to lead the fundraising committee on major projects.

The ability to use computers will be a definite asset.
This is a full-time position. Employment to commence December 1995.

Send resume to:
Ren Siebenga
Toronto District Christian High School
377 Woodbridge Ave.
Woodbridge, ON L4L 2S8
Phone: (905) 851-1772 or (416) 741-2273
Fax: (905) 851-9992.

Job Opportunities

CONTINGENT VACANCY IN CHEMISTRY

The King's University College, a Christian liberal arts college offering 3- and 4-year B.A. and B.Sc. degrees and a 2-year after degree B.Ed., is inviting applications from women and men for a chemistry vacancy.

This position is contingent on not staffing another position in 1996. The successful candidate should be broadly trained and will be expected to teach in one of the areas of analytical (preferred), physical, or inorganic chemistry, plus other courses to be determined. A commitment to excellence in teaching at both junior and senior levels, and to carrying out research with undergraduate students should be demonstrated. Several new courses in environmental chemistry are being developed to support both the chemistry major and a new environmental studies program. Candidates should indicate whether they might contribute to teaching or team teaching in the area of environmental chemistry. For a description of current chemistry faculty specialities on the internet, see: **http://www.kingsu.ab.ca/~ken/chem.htm**

A doctorate is required as well as agreement with the College's Christian Statement of Faith. **Starting date:** July 1, 1996 or July 1, 1997, contingent on staffing another position. **Deadline for application:** January 31,1996.

Send application letter, curriculum vitae, copies of transcripts, and three letters of reference to: **Dr. S. Keith Ward, Vice President (Academic), The King's University College, 9125-50 St., Edmonton, AB T6B 2H3. Tel: (403) 465-3500. Fax: (403) 465-3534. E-mail: skward@KingsU.ab.ca**

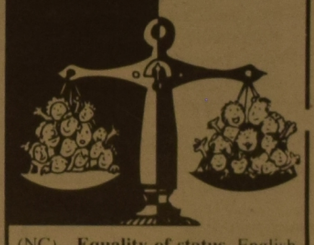
The King's University College is an equal opportunity employer, but in accordance with Canadian employment and immigration regulations, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN CANADA'S MILITARY HISTORY

04 August	1914	World War I begins
15 August	1945	Victory Over Japan Day (V-J Day)
19 August	1942	Dieppe Raid
03 September	1943	Invasion of Mainland Italy
10 September	1939	Canada declares war on Germany
October	1914	Battle of Passchendale
31 October	1940	Battle of Britain over
11 November	1918	Armistice Day - World War I ends
30 November	1915	Battle of the Somme ends
06 December	1917	Halifax Explosion
25 December	1941	Fall of Hong Kong

(NC)—An important role of The Royal Canadian Legion is to ensure that the sacrifice of Canadians lost in battle, and the horror of war not be forgotten. For more information on important dates in Canada's military history, contact Dominion Command, The Royal Canadian Legion, 359 Kent Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0R7 or call (613)235-4391.

IS THAT SO?



(NC)—**Equality of status.** English and French are the official languages of Canada and they have equality of status, rights and privileges in all institutions of Parliament and the federal government.

ACTIVE LIVING®
Go for Green!

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION IS HEALTHY

(NC)—Regular physical activity such as walking and cycling increases life expectancy, can prevent and manage coronary heart disease, hypertension, obesity , diabetes, osteoporosis and depression. Even moderate activity such as walking can produce measurable results. Good for you and good for the environment!

Events / Classifieds

Teachers

WOODBRIDGE, ONT.: A maternity leave position is available at **TORONTO DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL** beginning **January 29, 1996**. The courses involved are: **Physical Science grade 10** or **Canadian History grade 10, Old Testament grade 10, Physical Education grade 11** with some coaching responsibilities. Please send transcripts, resume and letter of inquiry to:

Ren Siebenga,
c/o Toronto Distr. Chr. High School
377 Woodbrige Ave., Woodbridge, ON L4L 2S8.

A decision on this position will be made December 15, 1995.

BOWMANVILLE, ONT.: Knox Christian school invites applications for a **grade 6** teaching position commencing possibly January 8, 1996 **or** May 1, 1996. Interested, qualified applicants should submit letter of application, references, and resume as soon as possible to:

Bill Helmus, Principal
Knox Christian School
410 Scugog St., R.R. 1,
Bowmanville, ON L1C 3K2
School: (905) 623-5871
Home: (905) 623-6952
Fax: (905) 623-8877

Church News

Christian Reformed Church
Calls received:
to Maranatha, Bowmanville, Ont., Rev. John Luth of First Barrie, Ont.

Calls declined:
to Wallaceburg, Ont. Rev. Henry Vander Beek of Iron Springs, Alta.

Miscellaneous

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T5A 4W2
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Sid Vandermeulen
Contact us first when you think of moving to Edmonton and district.

Het vertrouwde adres.

Miscellaneous

DCA Travel — Holland Travel Professional
Toronto 416-224-5211
Toll-Free (Canada wide)
1-800-667-2525
Fax 416-224-0842
Grimsby 905-945-3301
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BRAMPTON, ON (905) 457-1618

Events

ISRAEL
The Bible League invites you to join its
BIBLE LAND TOUR

New dates: February 21 — March 1, 1996
Special low offer: $2,149.00 p.p., ex. Toronto, dbl. occ., plus Dep. Tax.

VISIT
Jerusalem — Bethlehem — Nazareth — Masada and many other places.

Free stop-over in Amsterdam
Personally escorted by:
Rev. John G. Klomps
Executive Director, TBL

For complete information and reservations please call or write:
Rev. John G. Klomps
The Bible League
P.O. Box 5037, Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
(905) 319-9500 or 1-800-363-WORD

COUPON SUBSCRIBE NOW! COUPON

1945 Christian Courier 1995
4-261 Martindale Road,
St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1

This fall *Christian Courier* celebrated its 50th anniversary. This is the time to subscribe to North America's only Reformed weekly newspaper.

If you become a subscriber, or gain a new subscription for us, we will reward you by sending each of you a copy of Rev. Henry Van Andel's *Building on the Rock: Meditations on the Sermon on the Mount.*

Rev. Bastiaan Nederlof wrote that Rev. Van Andel's "meditations in *Calvinist Contact* were an expression of both his love for the Scriptures and his desire to convey true spirituality to the readers." **In addition, we will send you a copy of our 50th anniversary commemorative poster.**
Send this coupon to us and enclose a cheque for **$43.50 (or $35 US)**, payable to *Christian Courier*, for the following new subscriber:

Name: _____

Address: _____ **Town/City:** _____ **Code:** _____

Please also send the book and poster to:

Name (of present subscriber): _____

Address: _____ **Town/City:** _____ **Code:** _____

Note:
* This offer is not valid for subscription renewals.
* Cheque/money-order must be enclosed with this coupon.
* Offer expires December 31, 1995.

Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

* **Dec. 1** Organist Willem van Suydam in concert with the "New Life Choir," 8 p.m. , Cathedral of St. Catherine, Church St., **St. Catharines**, Ont. Info.: (905) 455-0797.
* **Dec. 2** Organist Willem van Suydam in concert with Woodstock and Brantford choirs, 8 p.m., Grace Anglican Church, **Brantford**, Ont. Info.: (905) 455-0797.
* **Dec. 1-5** Crossfire Assembly hosts the "Passion & Fire" prophetic conference with Jill Austin at Tivoli Theatre, 108 James St. N., **Hamilton**, Ont. Info.: (905) 525-8894.

Dec. 2 17th Annual Arts & Crafts Sale, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at TKUC, **Edmonton.**

* **Dec. 3** Frisian worship service, led by Rev. John D. Hellinga, 3 p.m., Ebenezer CRC, **Jarvis**, Ont. For info.: (519) 587-5069.
* **Dec. 3 and 10** "Nederlandse Kerstzangdienst," at 7:30 p.m., Emmanuel Ref. Church, 170 Clarke St. N., **Woodstock**, Ont. Info.: (519) 537-6422.

Dec. 6 Annual Redeemer College Christmas Choir Concert, with brass quintet and string orchestra, 8 p.m., in the auditorium, **Ancaster**, Ont. Tickets at the door: $10 ($8 Sr./Students). For ticket reservations call (905) 648-2131 or 1-800-263-6467.

* **Dec. 6** CFFO Convention & Banquet, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (banquet at 5:30 p.m.), Italian Canadian Club, 135 Ferguson St., **Guelph**, Ont. Info.: (519) 837-1620.

Dec. 8 Christmas concert by the "Hosanna Choir," directed by Herman Den Hollander, accompanied by John Vanderlaan and Mary De Vries, 8 p.m., CRC, **Ancaster**, Ont. Freewill offering. Info.: (905) 648-6585.

* **Dec. 8** Organist Willem van Suydam in concert with "The Fergus/Elora Singers," 8 p.m., Can. Ref. Church, **Fergus**, Ont. Info.: (905) 455-0797.
* **Dec. 9** Organist Willem van Suydam in concert with "The Fort William Male Choir," 8 p.m., St. Paul's United Church, **Thunder Bay**, Ont. Info.: (905) 455-0797.

Dec. 9-16 "Massed Choir Christmas Sing-a-long Concert," by the St. Thomas Male Choir, the St. Thomas Ladies Choir and the Strathroy Mixed Choir, directed by Jack Dykstra. **Dec. 9**: 7:30 p.m., Westmount CRC, **Strathroy**, Ont.; **Dec. 16**: 7:30 p.m., Knox Presb. Church, **St. Thomas**, Ont. Info.: (519) 631-9245.

Dec. 10 The Mississauga Choral Society presents Handel's "Messiah," 3 p.m., St. Dominic's Church (Atwater & Cawthra), **Mississauga**, Ont. Info.: (905) 278-7059.

Dec. 13-20 Christmas concerts by the Ont. Chr. Music Assembly, directed by Leendert Kooy, with Andre Knevel at the organ. All events start at 8 p.m. **Dec. 13**: Maranatha CRC, **Bowmanville**, Ont; **Dec. 16**: Willowdale United Church, **Willowdale**, Ont.; **Dec. 20**: Melrose United Church, **Hamilton**, Ont. Info.: OCMA (416) 636-9779.

Dec. 17 Dutch worship service, led by Rev. Henry R. De Bolster, 3 p.m., CRC, **Ancaster**, Ont.

Dec. 28-29: "Alleluia - '95" concerts by "The Ambassadors" with Stephanie Numan, violin. **Dec. 28**: 8 p.m., Mountainview CRC, **Grimsby**, Ont.; **Dec. 29**: First CRC, **Hamilton**, Ont. Info.: (416) 389-2104.

Meditation/ News

Allowing for a change of heart

Art White

In a small group that met weekly in my study, a young mother said, "I want to tell each of you how much you have helped me this week; especially you, Marilyn...."

Marge turned to her friend as she spoke, reached out, clasped her arm for a moment, then continued, "On Monday I was cleaning up in the kitchen. Michael was in the other room eating his lunch in front of the TV, and I heard him say, 'Uh-oh ..., uh-oh.'

"I knew right away what he had done. I just knew he had spilled his milk. I thought he might do it when I put his food on that wobbly tray and let him sit in his daddy's big easy chair.

"Any way, when he said 'Uh-oh' the third time, I tore off a strip of paper towel, just like you did with Jason, Marilyn, and I went in and said, 'Here, Michael, you help Mommy clean up the milk."

"Well, you should have seen him. There he was all scrunched down in that big chair, his hands sort of up around his neck, like this, so quiet, so frightened. When I asked him to help me clean up the spill, he looked up at me, and such a wonderful expression came over his face. Michael took the towel and helped me clean his tray. You know, he was really glad to help and excited about it!"

'Why didn't you beat me?'

Marge shifted awkwardly in her chair, canvassing each face in the group for a long moment. Then she continued: "I tell you, he really got to me when he looked up with those big brown eyes of his and asked, 'Mommy, why didn't you beat me?'" Marge's eyes filled with tears.

"I just didn't know what to say. All I could think was, 'What have I done to this child of mine that he should be *expecting* a beating for spilling half-a-cup of milk?' I just touched his little head and got back to the kitchen where he couldn't see these teary eyes.

"That's why I'm so grateful for our get-togethers and for the chance to share with each of you, because I'm learning things here I know I've wanted to do but haven't done on my own till now. I've been doing the same, old, dumb things my mother did to me.

"Like with Michael. Why didn't I think of Marilyn's paper towel idea instead of carrying on the way I always used to do and upsetting everyone? I tell you, in those three minutes Michael understood more about growing up than he ever learned from three years of spankings put together! I can still see his face looking up at me when he asked 'Why didn't you beat me?'"

A life-long bond

Marge's story is real and so is her predicament. It's the human story, our human predicament. Few of us who are parents seems able to completely break out of this circular parents-to-children connection without some sort of outside help, without other possibilities being shown to us in a personal way.

For Marge, the circle which kept her doing the things she didn't want to do was broken into by some practical alternatives, shard among a dozen sympathetic, non-judgmental, like-minded mothers who were on to the value of sharing important things in their lives.

Mothering young children may have been what they had in common at first, but before long they had each other, a marvelous sorority of women, keen to deal in a heartfelt way with life events as they experienced them: loneliness and the feel of isolation; cheerless, never-ending work' times of quiet regret and sadness; big mistakes; small successes; unsung pleasures. Together they discovered trust and the relief of a shared confession; they uncovered the well-spring of hilarity and were warmed by the embrace of a few kindred souls.

It has been years since I met with "my mothers," the first of many such groups. I still hear from nine of the 12 (mostly at Christmas). The remnant is strong. They remain fast friends: grieving, encouraging, rejoicing, feeling for and feeling with each other in intimate, uplifting ways. Most of their children are grown and living away (two have died). Three women have lost husbands (to accidental death, alcohol and infidelity). One remarried. Three of the nine returned to finish or advance their education. All are working outside their homes.

I think of these women when I remember Jesus' promise about being in the midst of even two or three who gather in his name. Collectively they represent conspicuous evidence of the Spirit's motivating ability to change hearts.

'I thank God for you'

Indeed, this small "church-within-a-church helped me appreciate more of what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the Philippians:

I give thanks to my God every time I think of you ... at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day. I am sure of this much: that he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion.... It is only right that I should entertain such expectations in your regard since I hold all of you so dear.... My prayer is that your love may more and more abound, both in understanding and wealth of experience, so that with a clear conscience and blameless conduct you may learn to value the things that really matter.

Montreal kids' choir helps other kids with cancer

MONTREAL (Canadian Scene) — Coro Bimbi Belli, Italian for "Beautiful Children' Choir," is a Montreal-based ensemble of 30 boys and girls aged six to 12. The choir is dedicated to helping children less fortunate than themselves, and has just produced *Friends, Amico, Ami,* a compact disc of songs in English, French and Italian.

Thirty per cent of the profits from the sales of the CD will be donated to Candlelighters Canada and the Leucan Association of Quebec. Candlelighters and Leucan are the only organizations of their kind in Canada dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for children with cancer. They have assisted with the development of more than 50 support groups across the country.

The cost of *Friends, Amico, Ami* is $14 plus tax, and it may be obtained by calling Candlelighters at 1-800-363-1062.

Help *Christian Courier* now!

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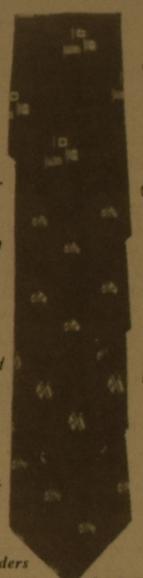

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News

Canadian Christian writer's work meshes with the mainstream

Gordon Legge

CALGARY — Bethany House Publishers bills her as "America's beloved story teller," though she's a Canadian. The literary magazine *Quill and Quire* suggests she may be Canada's most popular living novelist. A few weeks ago she was featured in a *Time* magazine article, U.S. edition. Ironically, the story didn't make the Canadian edition.

Janette Oke

But most people, both inside and outside the Christian church, would be hard-pressed to identify Calgary writer Janette Oke as that writer. Since 1979, however, Oke has written 33 books, which have sold almost 13.5 million copies.

Oke's most recent book, *The Gown of Spanish Lace*, released in August, has already sold 250,000 copies. That, notes *Time*, is more than the latest novels by Jackie Collins, John Irving or James Michener.

Pioneer setting

The gracious, red-haired grandmother has drawn on her memories and feelings for pioneer life in the West to produce several well-read series of simple, straight-forward stories filled with traditional values.

While writers like Frederick Buechner, Walker Percy, Andrew Greeley and Susan Howatch from mainline Christian denominations have infused their fiction with their faith, Oke is credited with pioneering the way in fiction for evangelical Christian readers, beginning with her first novel, *Love Comes Softly*, published in 1979.

An avid, life-long reader, Oke wrote that first book after becoming disenchanted with the sordid fiction she was encountering in the general marketplace. She wanted to provide readers with a choice, with wholesome characters who relied on sound principles from the Bible to lead a life of moral purity and ethical integrity.

Drawing people to God

"My primary goal is to draw people closer to God," Oke said during an interview at the Christian Booksellers Association international conference in Denver last summer, where she was busy meeting retailers and signing autographs. "If my writing accomplishes that, then it has served its purpose," she added.

"I like to present a wholesome lifestyle, hoping it will draw people towards it, rather than me saying, 'This is what's wrong.' Hearts have to be changed before outward action will be."

Oke's work, which focuses on pioneer life and the opening of the West, is regarded as inspirational romance. It's a growing segment in the romance market that is developing as a backlash against the graphic sex, blue language and steamy covers of many general market love stories.

But it's also part of the growing Christian fiction market for evangelical Christians that seeks to avoid offending readers while encouragaging and inspiring them.

Since 1985, fiction sales in the conservative Christian book industry have increased 300 per cent. Its popularity is due, in part, to the fact that sexual references are oblique, violent scenes limited and language plain-spoken but never vulgar. The genre is growing so quickly that other mainstream media have also taken notice. *The New York Times* devoted a front-page story to it in late October.

At one time, popular Christian fiction was poorly written and had one purpose: to evangelize. But not all Christian fiction fits that description today. *Library Journal* recently listed several categories: "Easy reads" like Oke's; conversion stories; tales which fictionalize the lives of biblical heroes of faith; apocalyptic fiction which features the forces of good and evil; and finally, novels that portray a character's struggle to define his or her moral and religious identity.

Evangelical readers may not appreciate this last category because such literature contains few or no references to the

Bible, does not usually contain the kind of conversion stories they're used to, and sometimes does include realistic portrayals of sex and violence. The characters act out of the knowledge that there is some kind of absolute moral power against which one's actions are judged; the conflicts arise when they struggle to reconcile themselves and their actions to the declarations of this absolute moral law.

Because such literature may not be overtly Christian, conservative Christian publishers are beginning to market some of their books in mainstream bookstores in the hopes of attracting readers who are interested in stories with a more overt moral and ethical framework.

Confronts every-day problems

What makes Oke's brand of Christian fiction appealing is that it deals with situations and problems that touch the lives of every-day readers.

Oke's books have tackled alcoholism, sexual abuse and interracial marriage. By doing so, she has touched a responsive chord in many readers. She receives an average of 800 to 1,000 letters annually from people in all walks of life, from teenagers to grandmothers.

Men read her too. In fact, she recently received a letter from a man in prison who praised her work. Oke's writing has become a ministry to which she brings a minister's touch. Oke prays through every stage.

As she wrote in an author's note at the beginning of *A Gown of Spanish Lace*: "If even one reader finds some encouragement or direction — or hope — then the story will have served a purpose. If you happen to be that reader, may you know at the outset — I have prayed for you."

Oke's writing quota has dropped to two books from three books a year. Living on an acreage near Calgary, she heads off to a local hotel room for a week or two of seclusion to rough out the first draft for each new book.

Her latest (unpublished) book, *Drums of Change* is due out in April 1996.

A burden for Canada

Much of Oke's earnings are used to support a variety of Christian programs she values and considers important. The income has also made it easer to stay in touch with her far-flung family.

She writes with the keen support and prayers of her husband, Ed, who is academic vice-president at Calgary's Rocky Mountain College, a centre for biblical studies. "I just carry her laptop," he quips.

Oke, a native of Champion, Alberta, who was raised in a devout Christian family, carries "a burden" for Canada, she says. She explains: "A country cannot exist without a moral code. I think my biggest concern is for the generations of young people. We've left them to flounder. We've left them with no base, no foundation. These are our mothers and fathers and leaders of tomorrow. It breaks my heart."

To address that burden, Oke's books are "paper missionaries." As she told the booksellers in a souvenir preview edition, "Any 'heart changes' that take place are the Lord's doing — but we have the privilege of being a link in the chain that draws an individual to him."

News Digest

Church dumps stock to avoid 'Playboy' support

LONDON, England (EP) — The Church of England is selling its more than $3 million dollar stake in a satellite television company to protest the company's decision to carry the Playboy Channel. The Methodist Church made the same move a week earlier. Church of England officials say that they decided to sell because they didn't want to benefit from firms directly marketing pornography.

Christian values are the foundation for freedom, says Kohl

BONN, Germany (EP) — German Chancellor Helmut Kohl wrote recently about "family values" in a magazine published by the Christian Democratic Union.

"Churches have preached about the dignity of the individual. Without this message, freedom and democracy would not exist in their present form," wrote Kohl. He added, "The partnership between husband and wife, the love to their children, the solidarity between the generations — these factors can only influence our society once they have proved themselves within the family. Germany has no future without the virtues on which the family was founded."

CHP names new leader

LONDON, Ont. — The Christian Heritage Party has chosen a new leader: Ron Gray, a former journalist and civil servant from B.C. Gray succeeds Jean Blaquiere, who left politics for church ministry. Gray told the CHP convention which elected him that the party must restore Canada's "Christian heritage" through the biblical principles of equity, justice, tolerance and mercy. But that does *not* mean "forcing religion on others," he says.

Gray says CHP's "natural constituency" is the 79 per cent of Canadians who consider themselves Christians.